6082

Air War Over Korea

by Jim Mesko

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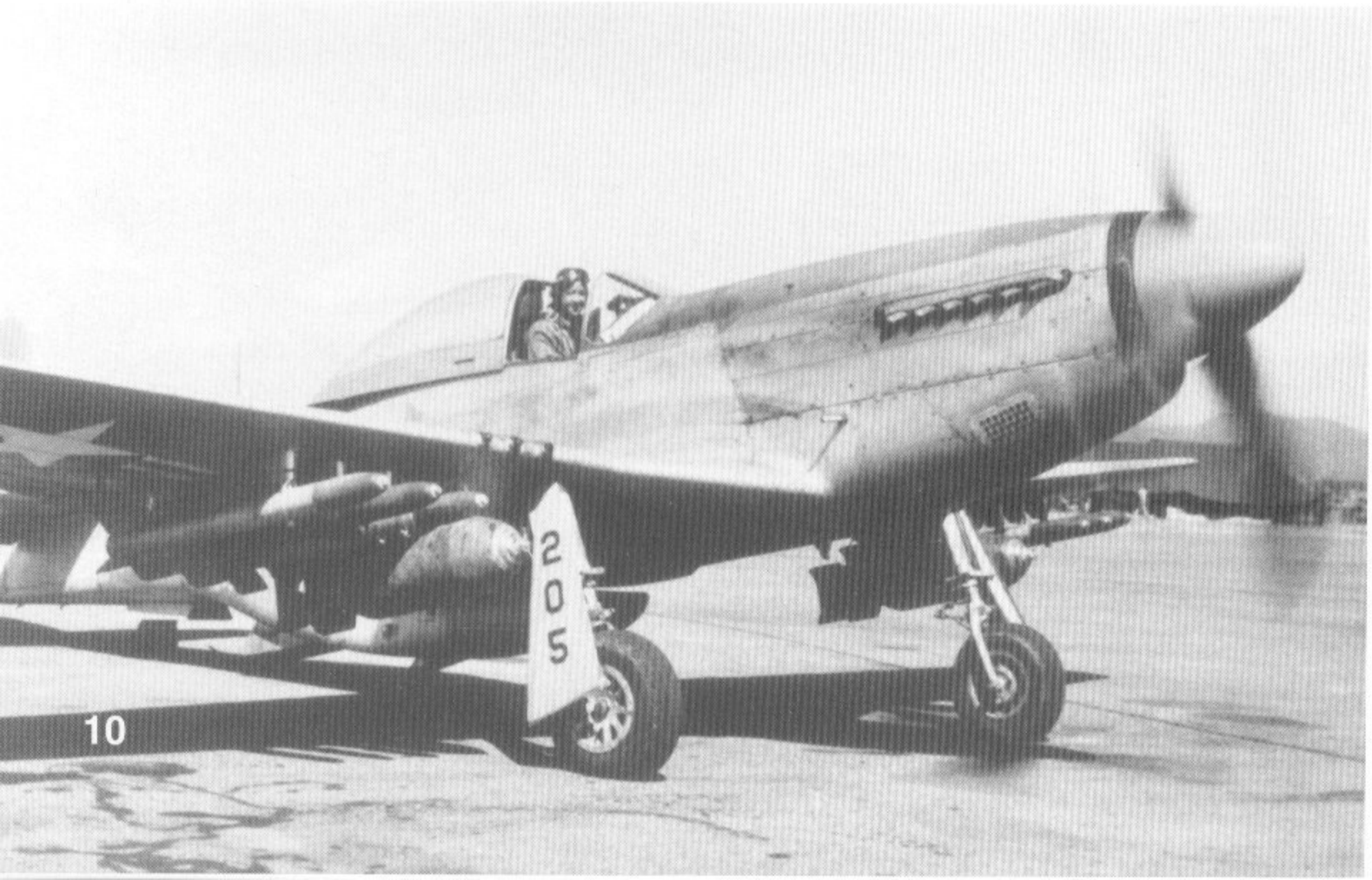
squadron/signal publications

Lockheed F-80 Shooting Stars based in Japan provided early close air support, although their time over target was limited due to the aircraft's range. This F-80C (47-526) from the 49th Fighter-Bomber Group (FBG) lifts off from Itazuke, Japan, since there were no airfields in South Korea capable of handling jet aircraft. The fighter is carrying only a few rockets and has the new 'Misawa' tip tanks (named for the manufacturing location), which helped extend range and gave the F-80s more time over the battlefield. (USAF/NA)

Sufficient numbers of F-51s were acquired from stateside units to form several squadrons based in Korea, including this aircraft at Taegu. Operating close to the front, the Mustangs were able to react quickly when ground units called for air support. Parked at the far end of the field are Mustangs assigned to No. 77 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), which were based in Japan on occupation duties when the Korean War began. (USAF/NA)



An F-51 taxis out for a mission during August of 1950, armed with a 500 lb bomb and three 5 inch rockets under each wing. Mustangs were able to carry far more ordnance than the F-80s and proved ideal for ground support. F-51s could carry bombs, rockets, and napalm, and loiter over the battlefield for hours in search of targets. Their one drawback was the vulnerability of their inline engine's cooling system to ground fire. (USAF/NA)

On the ground, the Marines had deliberately slowed their advance toward the Chosin Reservoir despite urges from MacArthur's headquarters to move more quickly. The Marines suspected a trap along the narrow mountain road which was their sole axis of advance — events were to prove them right. On 28 November the Chinese launched a massive attack consisting of seven divisions against the 1st Marine Division. Although the Marines were able to hold out they were surrounded and faced possible annihilation. In true Marine tradition they did not falter, but instead began a methodical retreat, fighting as they went, bringing out their wounded and in many cases even their dead. Overhead, both Navy and Marine aircraft provided massive cover, attacking the Chinese wherever they were spotted. These fliers inflicted horrendous casualties on the Chinese troops and it is highly unlikely that the Marines would have made it to the coast without this outstanding effort. Even at night the aircraft of VMF(N)-513 and 542 were overhead, providing both physical and moral support to the trapped Marines. Air Force, Navy, and Marine cargo aircraft brought in food and ammunition to the surrounded troops and took out the wounded using a series of crude runways which the Marines had the foresight to build during their initial advance. Old TBM-3 Avengers were used to fly out casualties from the small airstrip at Koto-ri. On 4 December Lt(JG) Thomas Hudner won the Congressional Medal of Honor for crash landing his Corsair next to his wingman, Ensign Jessie Brown — the US Navy's first black aviator. Brown had been shot down by ground fire. Hudner's heroic efforts did not save Brown who was trapped in the cockpit of his Corsair and eventually Hudner was forced to leave when nightfall approached. Hudner was picked up by a VMO-6 rescue helicopter which had tried to assist in the rescue. The next day a flight of Corsairs returned to the scene and used napalm to incinerate Brown's body and his Corsair.

With the help of air support the Marines gradually began to pull back from their positions at Chosin. Moving systematically down the narrow mountain road the leathernecks withdrew to the south, gathering up units strung out along the route. By 6 December, the Marine columns had reached Hagaru; two days later they reached Koto-ri, the last stop before reaching safety. Unfortunately, the Chinese had destroyed a major bridge south of the town and this threatened to stop the retreat cold. The US Air Force, using C-119s, dropped replacement bridge spans by parachute. The spans were moved into place, which allowed the Marines to break

The Soviet T-34/85 medium tank was the NKPA's most deadly weapon. This tank, a veteran of World War II, was greatly feared by both US and South Korean troops, who initially had no weapons with which to destroy it. Napalm was the most effective weapon against T-34s — a direct hit was not needed due to the coverage napalm gave when it hit the ground. This T-34 was the victim of a napalm attack near Suwon. (USAF/NA)

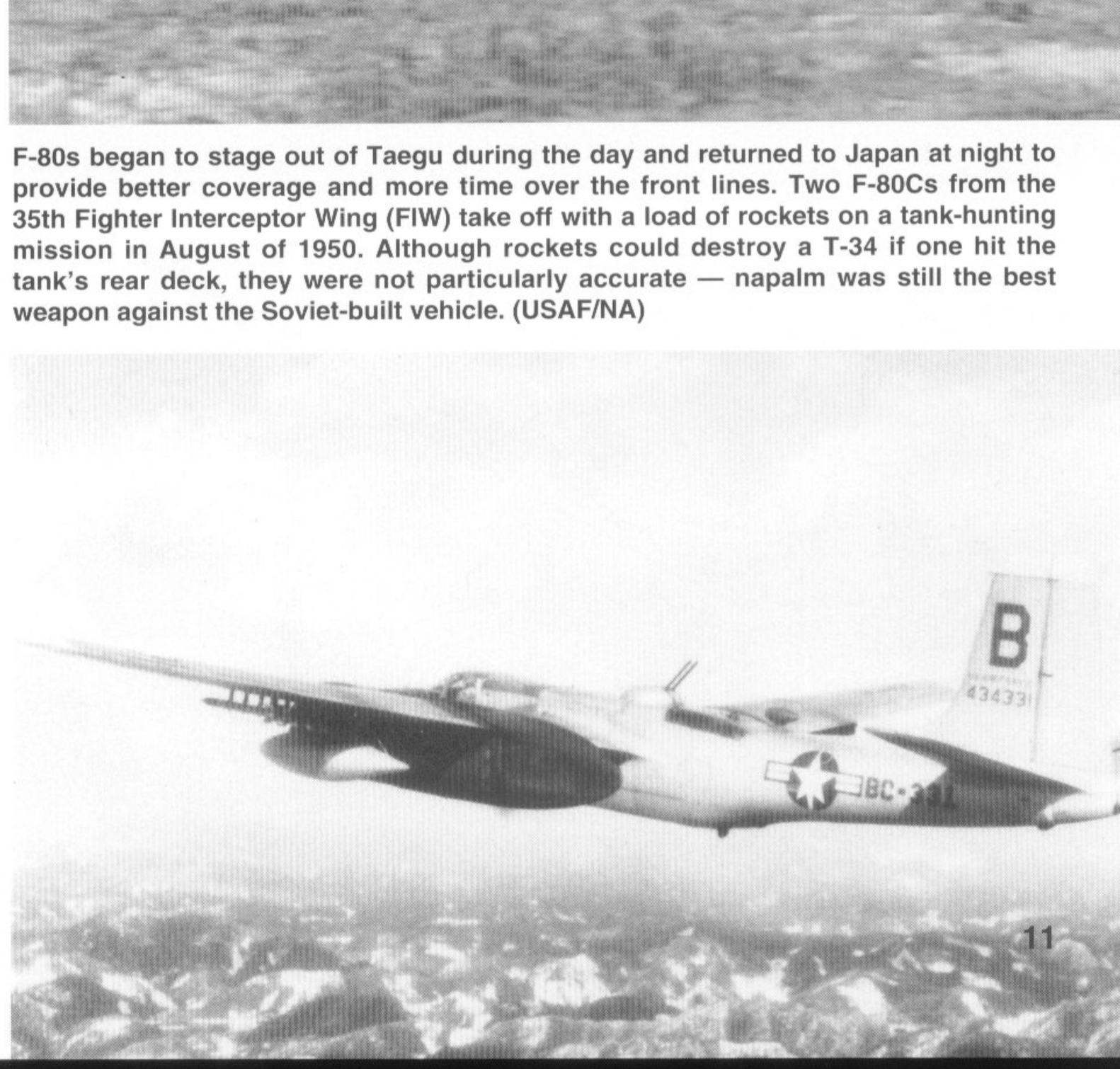
North American T-6 Texan trainers were used in the Forward Air Controller (FAC) role to locate and mark targets for the fighter-bombers. The T-6s were extremely effective in this role and provided a vital link between the ground and air units. The Texan in the background was among a few T-6s camouflaged to reduce their visibility to North Korean fighters, which occasionally got past covering USAF fighters. (USAF/NA)

out and reach the safety of the port city of Hungnam where they were evacuated. With the help of air support the Marines were able to inflict nearly 40,000 casualties on the Chinese which blunted their attack and allowed other UN forces to be safely extracted. Without this support it would have been impossible for the Marine and Army troops to have been rescued; the Chinese might well have been able to drive UN forces off the peninsula.

When 1950 came to a close the United States and its allies faced a completely new war both in the air and on the ground. The intervention of Chinese ground troops and the introduction of the MiG-15 totally changed the complexity of the war. The future of the war perhaps looked even gloomier than it had looked during the early summer. Air power had been instrumental in saving the situation numerous times during the hectic retreat and holding action around Pusan. When the UN forces took the offensive, it was equally instrumental in the decimation of the NKPA in the drive north. In turn air power helped provide some breathing space to these same forces when the Chinese counterattacked. It now faced an even greater challenge: the very existence of the ground forces would depend on the ability of the Air Force, Navy, Marine, and allied airmen to help blunt the communist drive that was once again pushing relentlessly south.

F-80s began to stage out of Taegu during the day and returned to Japan at night to provide better coverage and more time over the front lines. Two F-80Cs from the 35th Fighter Interceptor Wing (FIW) take off with a load of rockets on a tank-hunting mission in August of 1950. Although rockets could destroy a T-34 if one hit the tank's rear deck, they were not particularly accurate — napalm was still the best weapon against the Soviet-built vehicle. (USAF/NA)

One the war's best close air support aircraft was the Douglas B-26 Invader, which could carry a large array of ordnance over long distances. With six or eight .50 caliber (12.7MM) machine guns in the nose and six more weapons in the wings, the Invader was the ultimate strafer. A large internal bomb load, backed up by wing racks – which could carry rockets, bombs, and napalm – made the B-26 one of the most deadly aircraft of the war. B-26s of the 3rd BG carried out the first official raid north of the 38th Parallel on 28 June. (USAF/NA)



This Lockheed P2V-3 Neptune flew ov
Marine positions at night, dropping flares
provide illumination for attacking aircraft a
troops on the ground. Neptunes were used
patrol, attack, and observation roles duri
the war. Eventually, seven Neptune squadro
would see service in Korea. (USMC/NA)

Two Grumman TBM-3E Avengers – this one
running its engine – used the advance airstr
at Koto-Ri to evacuate casualties during th
breakout from the Chosin Reservoir. In a si
day period, Captain Alfred McCaleb of VMO
and Lt Truman Clark of VMF(N)-513 flew ou
103 wounded Marines to Yonpo for evacuatio
to hospitals in Japan. (USMC/NA)

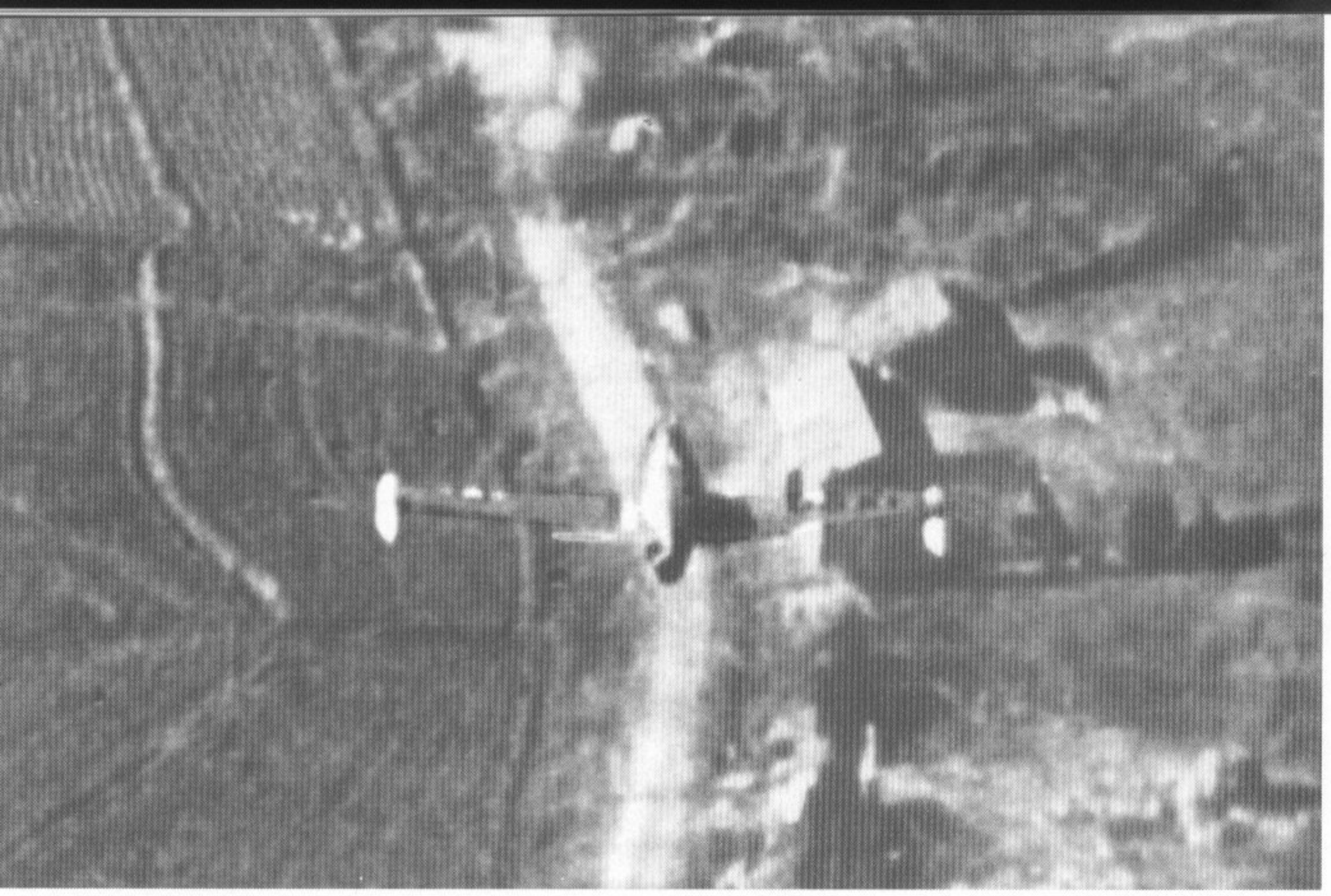
Off shore, the US fleet endured horrendous
winter weather, which made flight operations
extremely dangerous. These Corsairs and
Skyraiders sit on the snow-covered aft deck o
the USS PHILIPPINE SEA (CV-47) in late
November. Pilots going down in the frigid
waters off the Korean coast had a life
expectancy measured in minutes. (USN/NA)

Ground crew refuel this Grumman F9F-2B Panther assigned to VMF-311 at Yonpo. The Panther is armed with four air-to-ground rockets under the port wing and four 20MM cannons in the nose. VMF-311 was the first Marine jet squadron and flew missions out of Yonpo from 10 through 14 December. (USMC/NA)

In late November of 1950, South Africa began operations using F-51s of No. 2 Squadron. The unit was assigned to the US 18th Fighter Bomber Wing (FBW) and flew their first mission out of Taegu (K-2), then moved to Pyongyang East just as the Chinese were launching their massive ground attack. No. 2 Squadron was better known as the 'Flying Cheetahs,' after the two cheetah cubs the South Africans brought with them as mascots. (USAF/NA)

The air war took a new turn in November, when Soviet-built MiG-15s were encountered. No UN aircraft in the theater was comparable to this fast, swept wing fighter. To counter the MiG threat, the 4th FIW was rushed from the US to Korea. The Wing was flying the best fighter in the USAF inventory, the North American F-86A Sabre. These Sabres are being prepared for a fighter sweep out of Kimpo over northwest Korea near the Yalu River — known for the next three years as 'MiG Alley.' (USAF/NA)

In addition to being the first jet war, Korea was also the first helicopter conflict. Helicopters were first used during the early days of the war to rescue downed pilots, and later, for casualty evacuation. This Sikorsky HO3S-1 Dragonfly, assigned to HU-1 aboard the PHILIPPINE SEA, rescues a pilot from the frigid waters of the Sea of Japan in early 1951. Speed was essential due to the low water temperature, which quickly caused hypothermia. (USN/NA)



Fighter-bombers had to go in low to hit their targets and suffered the most losses of any type during the Korean War. This F-80C comes in for a bomb run on huts believed to contain camouflaged vehicles or supplies. Over the course of the conflict, the communists often set up decoy targets to catch the fighter-bombers in a flak trap. (USAF/NA)

An F9F-2B Panther (BuNo 123633), assigned to VF-191 from the USS PRINCETON (CV-37), flies over a valley in North Korea. Just above the river junction is a bridge which may be the Panther's target. Twenty-one mission markers are painted aft of the cockpit. The F9F is painted in overall Glossy Sea Blue (FS15042) – the standard color used for US Navy and Marine aircraft during the Korean War. (USN/NA)

Carrier operations are fraught with danger, even when flight operations are not in progress. An F4U-4B caught fire while parked forward aboard the USS PHILIPPINE SEA and had to be covered with chemical foam to prevent the fire spreading to other aircraft. The Corsairs were assigned to VF-113 and VF-114, while the Skyraiders belonged to VA-115. (USN/NA)

After their initial employment in the fighter and ground support roles, the F-82 Twin Mustangs were used for both night interdiction missions over North Korea and for night defense of Far East Air Force (FEAF) bases. These two F-82Gs were based at Kimpo Air Base (K-14) during the spring of 1951. (USAF/NA)

Britain's Royal Navy kept an aircraft carrier on station throughout the Korean War — alternating between the east and west sides of the peninsula. This Hawker Sea Fury from No. 801 Squadron prepares to launch from HMS GLORY in the summer of 1951. A Sea Fury FB Mk 11, flown by Lt Peter 'Hoagy' Carmichael of No. 802 Squadron from HMS OCEAN, shot down a MiG-15 in August of 1952. (USN/NA)

British and Australian Aircraft Carriers Deployed During the Korean War

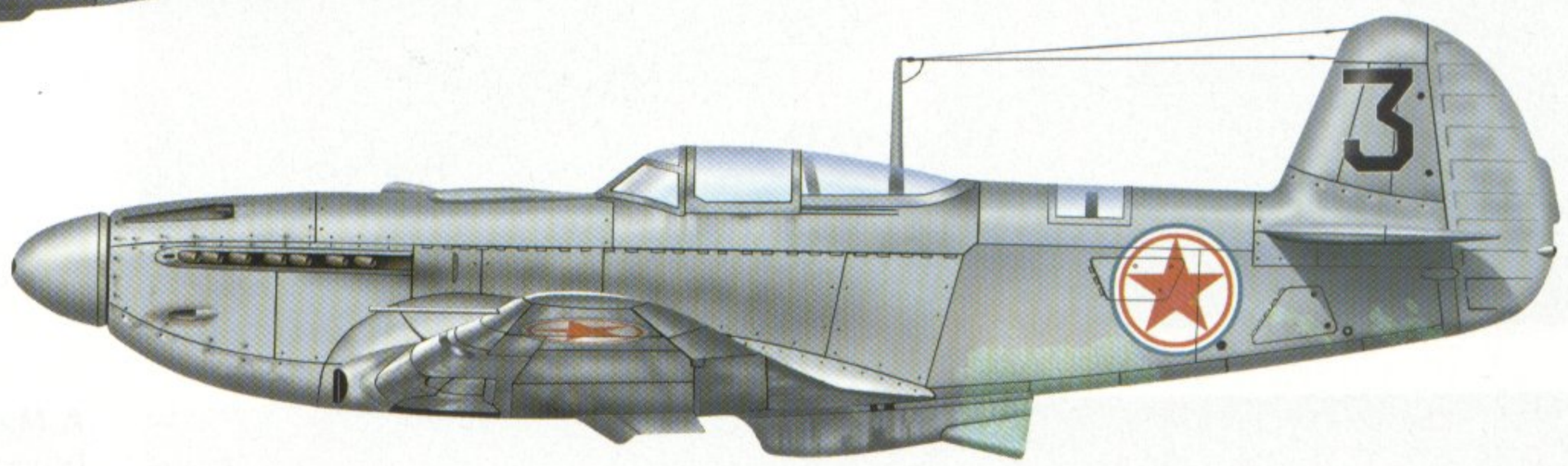
HMS COLOSSUS
HMS WARRIOR
HMS THESEUS
HMS OCEAN
HMS TRIUMPH
HMS GLORY
HMAS SYDNEY

A Fairey Firefly Mk 5 lifts off from GLORY for a strike against targets around Wonsan. British carriers normally had one squadron of Sea Furies for escort duties and one squadron of Fireflys for attack missions. The standard Fleet Air Arm color scheme consisted of Extra Dark Sea Grey (FS16118) upper surfaces and Sky (FS14424) sides and under surfaces. British carrier aircraft wore alternating white and black identification bands around their fuselages and wings. (USN/NA)

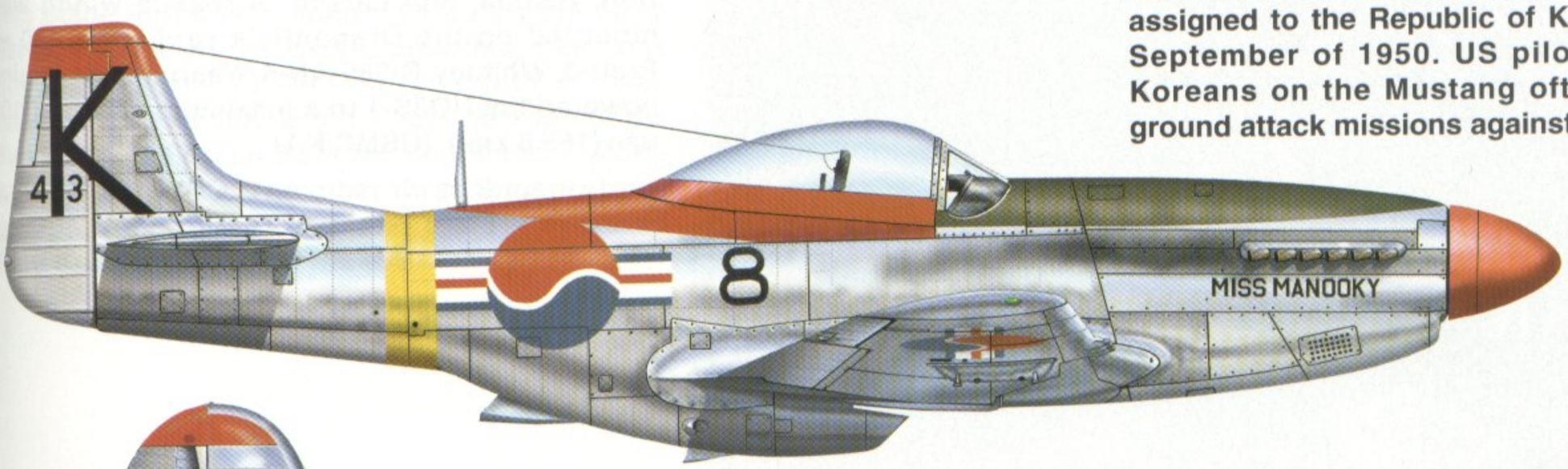
(Above) The RAAF's No. 77 Squadron began to convert from F-51s to the Gloster Meteor F Mk 8 — a twin-engine, straight wing jet developed during World War II – in the spring of 1951. By the summer, the Australians were ready for combat and flew their first jet mission, escorting fighter-bombers near the Yalu, on 29 July. The Meteors were eventually found to be no match for the MiG-15s and they were switched to the fighter-bomber role. *Snookes* (A77-134) is being waved forward to its wheel chocks after a mission. (Horne via Australian War Memorial)

(Below) A pair of LT-6Gs from the 6147th Tactical Control Squadron (TCS) sit on the side of a runway awaiting their next mission. Smoke rockets mounted under the port wing of the near aircraft were used to mark targets for fighter-bombers. The LT-6G was a T-6G Texan trainer remanufactured for the FAC role in Korea. The Douglas C-47 Skytrain coming in for a landing is from the 21st Troop Carrier Squadron, the 'Kuyushu Gypsies.'(USAF/NA)

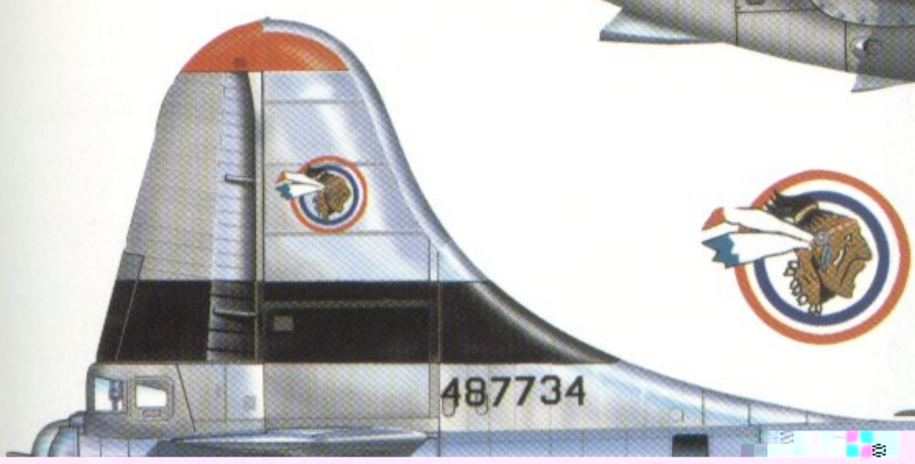
This Ilyushin Il-10, Yellow 55, of the North Korean People's Air Force supported the invasion forces against the South in the summer of 1950. This Soviet-built ground attack aircraft was a later variant of the famous Il-2 Stormovik of World War II.



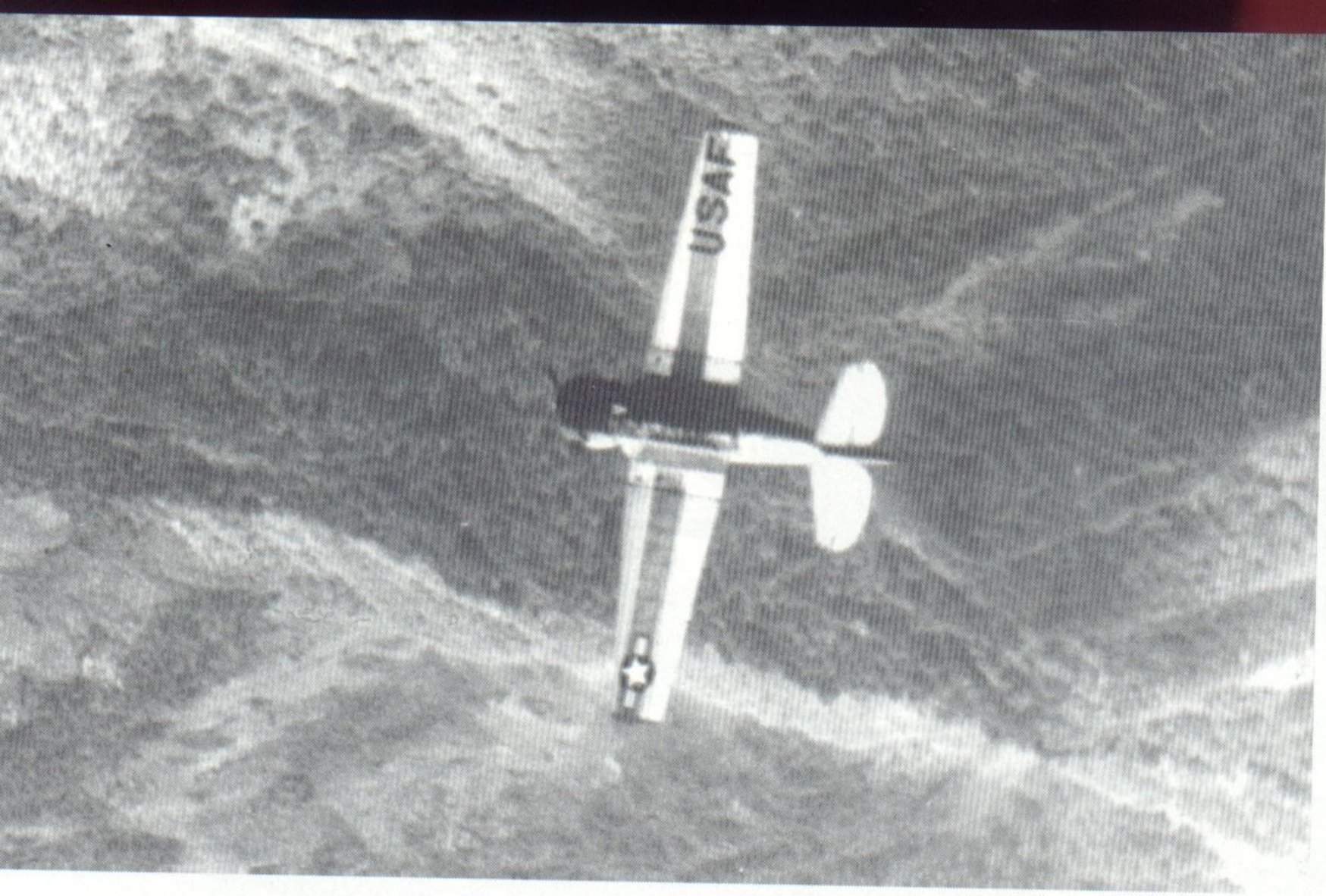
Yakovlev Yak-9P, Black 3, helped provide fighter cover for the North Korean forces in 1950. The North Korean pilots, although inexperienced in air combat, downed a small number of US aircraft, but lost 20 aircraft to USAF and USN pilots in the early stages of the war.



MISS MANOOKY was a North American F-51D Mustang assigned to the Republic of Korea Air Force at Taegu in September of 1950. US pilots instructing the South Koreans on the Mustang often flew these aircraft on ground attack missions against the North Koreans.



"DOUBLE WHAMMY" was a Boeing B-29 Superfortress (44-87734) assigned to the 93rd BS, 19th BG at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa in June of 1950. This aircraft was one of three B-29s which began bombing missions against the North Koreans one day before official permission for such attacks was given on 28 June.



An LT-6G from the 6147th TCS rolls right ont target prior to marking it for fighter-bombe The red panel across the wing made it easier the fighter-bombers to spot the FAC. The FACs were nicknamed Mosquitoes after t radio call sign given to the unit. (USAF/NA)

A Marine HO3S-1 Dragonfly assigned to VMO hovers over a forward airstrip north of Seou The Marines used the HO3S for casualty evacu tion, rescue, and liaison. A rescue winch wa mounted on the Dragonfly's roof. One 450 H Pratt & Whitney R-985-AN-5 Wasp Junior engi powered the HO3S-1 to a maximum speed of 10 MPH (165.8 KMH). (USMC/NA)

The Bell HTL-4, which could carry more wounded then the HO3S, later replaced the Dragonfly in the casualty evacuation role with the US Marine Corps. Two wounded Marines are being placed on carrier racks mounted above the skids for transfer back to an aid station. WB on the aircraft's nose was the code for VMO-6. The HTL-4 was the Navy and Marine counterpart to the US Army's H-13D, which saw extensive service in the casualty evacuation role in Korea. (USMC/NA)

Vought F4U-4 Corsair (BuNo 97417) was assigned to VF-653 aboard the USS VALLEY FORGE (CV-45) in 1951-52. VF-653 was a Naval Reserve squadron based at NAS Akron, Ohio when it was called up for the Korean War during the summer of 1951. The unit was commanded by Cook Cleland, the winner of the Thompson Trophy air race in 1949.

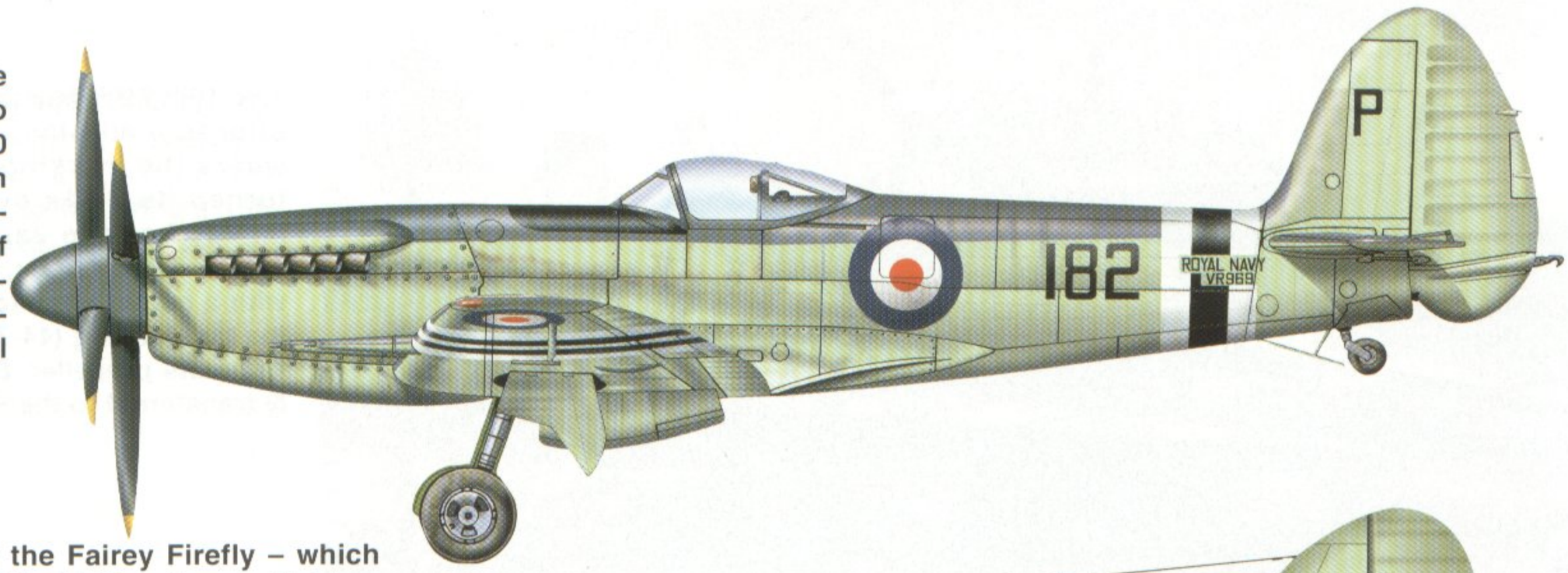
Grumman F9F-5 Panther (BuNo 126034) was operated by VF-781 aboard the USS ORISKANY (CV-34) in November of 1952. A Panther scored the US Navy's first victory – a Yak-3 – of the Korean War on 3 July 1950.

The Douglas AD-4N was a night attack version of the AD-4 Skyraider and was operated by a crew of three. *Dawn* was assigned to VA-95 aboard the USS PHILIPPINE SEA (CV-47) in May of 1953.

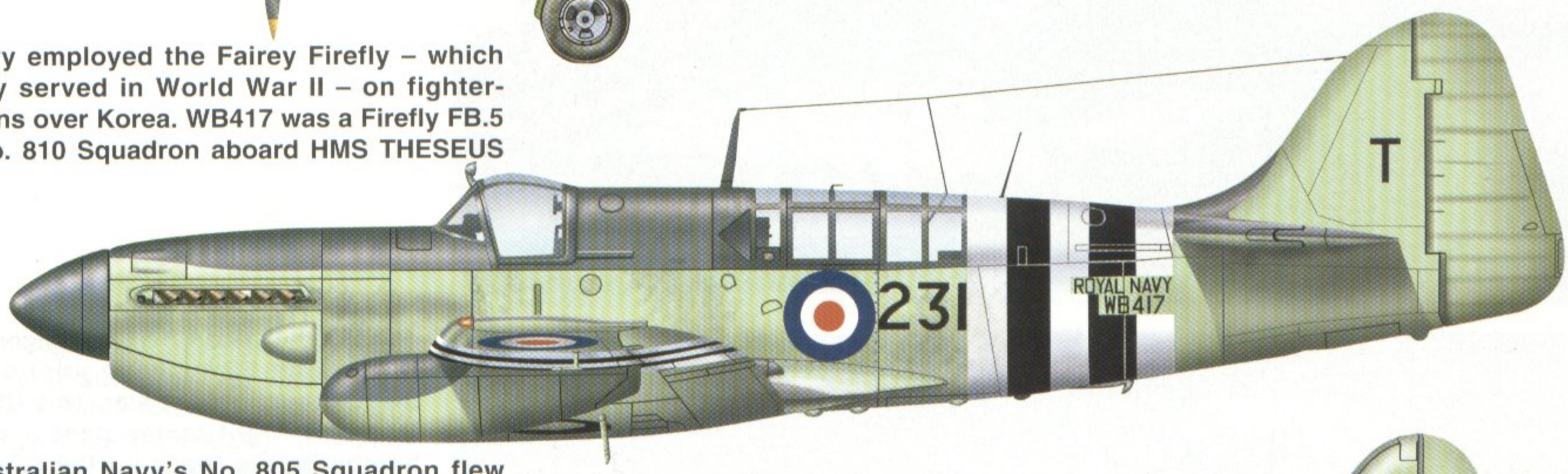
McDonnell F2H-2 Banshee (BuNo 123941) was operated by VF-62 aboard the USS LAKE CHAMPLAIN (CV-39) in the summer of 1953. US, British, and Australian aircraft carriers operated in the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea on a rotating basis throughout the conflict.

An HO3S-1 Dragonfly assigned to HU-1 powers up on the deck of the USS ESSEX (CV-9). HU-1 provided detachments for all carriers deployed off the Korean coast during the war. The helicopters provided instant response for plane crashes and often made the difference between life and death for pilots forced down in the frigid waters. (Ivy)

VR969 was a Supermarine Seafire FR.47 assigned to the Fleet Air Arm's No. 800 Squadron aboard the British aircraft carrier HMS TRIUMPH during the summer of 1950. Black and white fuselage and wing bands identified Commonwealth naval aircraft to US pilots.



The Royal Navy employed the Fairey Firefly – which had previously served in World War II – on fighter-bomber missions over Korea. WB417 was a Firefly FB.5 assigned to No. 810 Squadron aboard HMS THESEUS in 1950-51.



The Royal Australian Navy's No. 805 Squadron flew this Hawker Sea Fury FB.11 (VX730) from the deck of HMAS SYDNEY during the fall of 1951. SYDNEY and the British carriers operated with the US Navy's Task Force 77 in the waters around the Korean Peninsula.

CAP'N MAC was a Gloster Meteor F.8 (A77-868) flown by No. 77 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force from Suwon during the spring of 1953. This aircraft has borrowed the belly mounted external fuel tank from another Meteor in the unit, A77-157.

An F-51D (366) of No. 2 Squadron, South African Air Force, taxies out from Osan on mission during the summer of 1952. The Mustang is loaded with both bombs and rockets for a strike on communist transportation targets north of the Main Line of Resistance (MLR). (USAF/NA via Bell)

Two 18th FBW Mustangs are loaded with rockets prior to a mission. The near F-51D (44-74488) wears the markings of the 35th FIW, which turned its F-51s over to the 18th when they moved back to Japan for transition back to F-80s. Additionally, the near F-51 is equipped with a cuffed Hamilton Standard propeller, while the far Mustang (44-74597) has an uncuffed Aero Products propeller. Both fighters were eventually transferred to the ROKAF. (USAF/NA)

The South African F-51 contingent was attached to the 18th FBW, flying joint operations with them throughout the war. This US-South African Mustang flight taxies past a stack of 500 lb bombs before reaching the runway for a mission. By this stage of the war, 18th FBW F-51s had been given a distinctive shark mouth on their noses. (USAF/NA)

RF-80As from the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing (TRW) sit on the runway at Kimpo (K-14) waiting for a mission. Reconnaissance played a vital part in the aerial campaign, whether discerning enemy intentions, locating targets, or assessing bombing results. Korean carts and horses provide an interesting contrast to the marvels of jet aviation. (USAF/NA)

This North American F-86A Sabre (49-1319) was shot down by Col Evgeniy Pepelyaev – a Soviet 'volunteer' pilot for the North Koreans – in October of 1951. The Sabre force-landed on a mud flat in North Korea and was later recovered by the communist forces and sent to Moscow for evaluation. This F-86 was previously flown by Capt James Jabara, who would become the second-leading ace of the war.

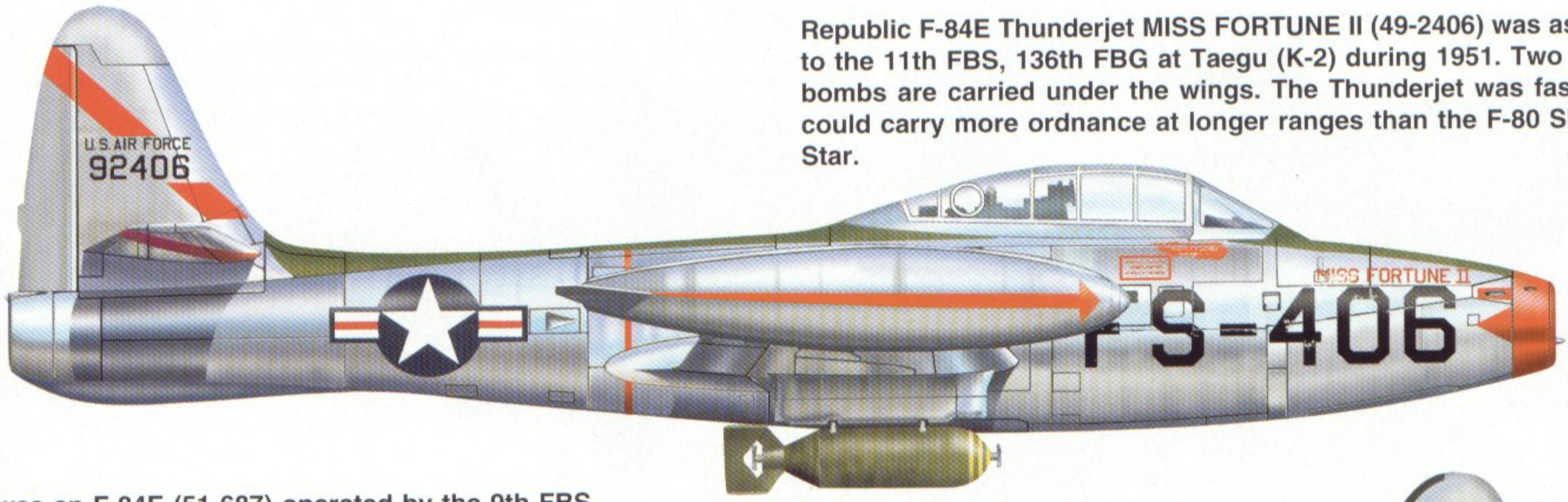
A Soviet pilot flew this North Korean People's Air Force Mikoyan-Guryevich MiG-15bis, Red 231, in December of 1950. The existence of Soviet 'volunteer' pilots flying for North Korea and China was kept secret until 1989.

FATHER DAN was an F-86E-10 (51-2738) assigned to Capt Cecil Foster of the 25th FIS, 51st FIW at Suwon (K-13). Foster ended the war with nine victories.

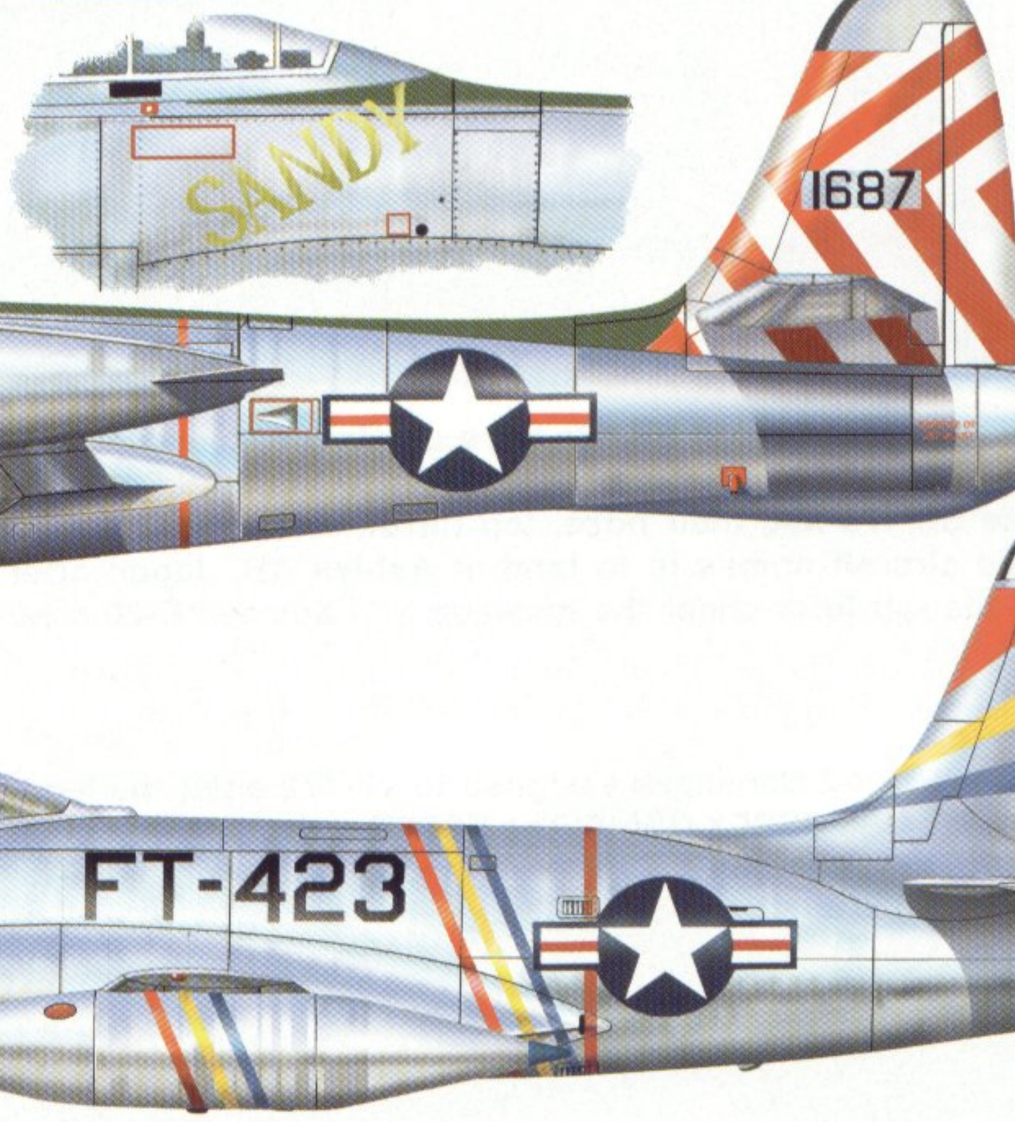
Lt Pete 'Freddie' Frederick flew *"Glory-Us,"* a Canadair-built F-86E-6 Sabre (52-2857) while serving with the 336th FIS, 4th FIW at Kimpo (K-14). Frederick scored three 'kills' over Korea and ended the conflict as a Captain.

MACH KNOCKER, an F-86E-1 (50-620) assigned to the 51st FIW, is readied for take-off from Suwon. The crew chief pulls the mobile generator away, while the pilot makes last minute preparations before taxing out. The Sabre is equipped with the early fiberglass nose intake ring and has one victory marking under the cockpit. The primitive nature of the airfield is evident from the PSP matting and the sandbagged revetment. Suwon was eventually upgraded with more permanent facilities. (USAF/NA via Bell)

Republic F-84E Thunderjet MISS FORTUNE II (49-2406) was assigned to the 11th FBS, 136th FBG at Taegu (K-2) during 1951. Two 1000 lb bombs are carried under the wings. The Thunderjet was faster and could carry more ordnance at longer ranges than the F-80 Shooting Star.

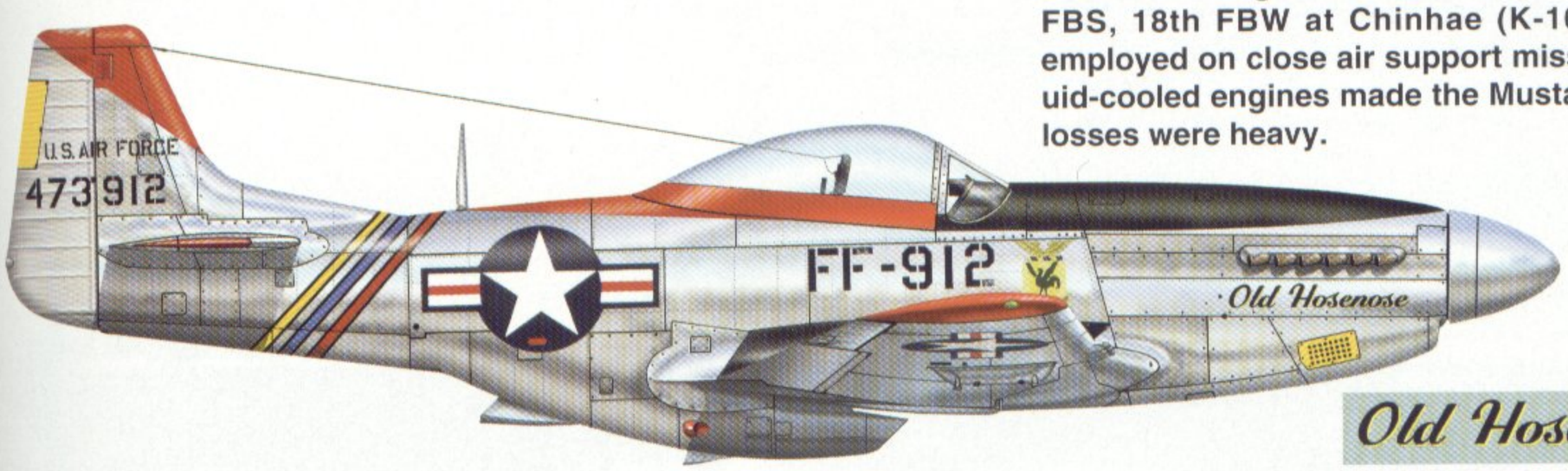


SANDY was an F-84E (51-687) operated by the 9th FBS, 49th FBW at Taegu during 1951. The name was painted in yellow on the mid-fuselage above the wing.

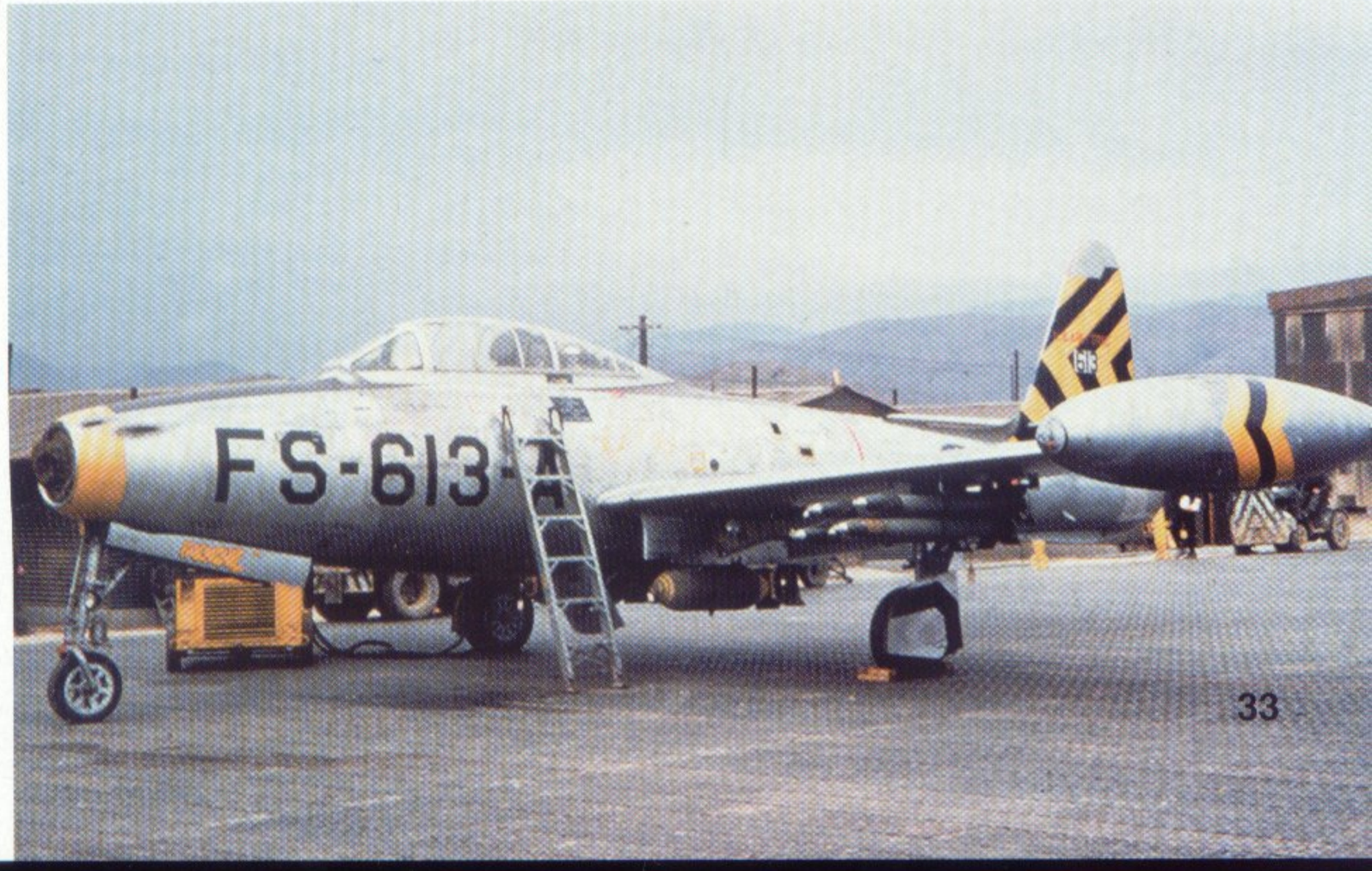


Lt Col Levi Chase, Commander of the 8th FBG, flew this Lockheed F-80C Shooting Star (49-423) from Suwon in March of 1952. The three-colored trim represents the Group's three squadrons: the 35th, 36th, and 80th FBS.

F-51D Mustang *Old Hosenose* (44-73912) was assigned to the 67th FBS, 18th FBW at Chinhae (K-10) in late 1952. The F-51s were employed on close air support missions in Korea; however, their liquid-cooled engines made the Mustangs vulnerable to enemy fire and losses were heavy.

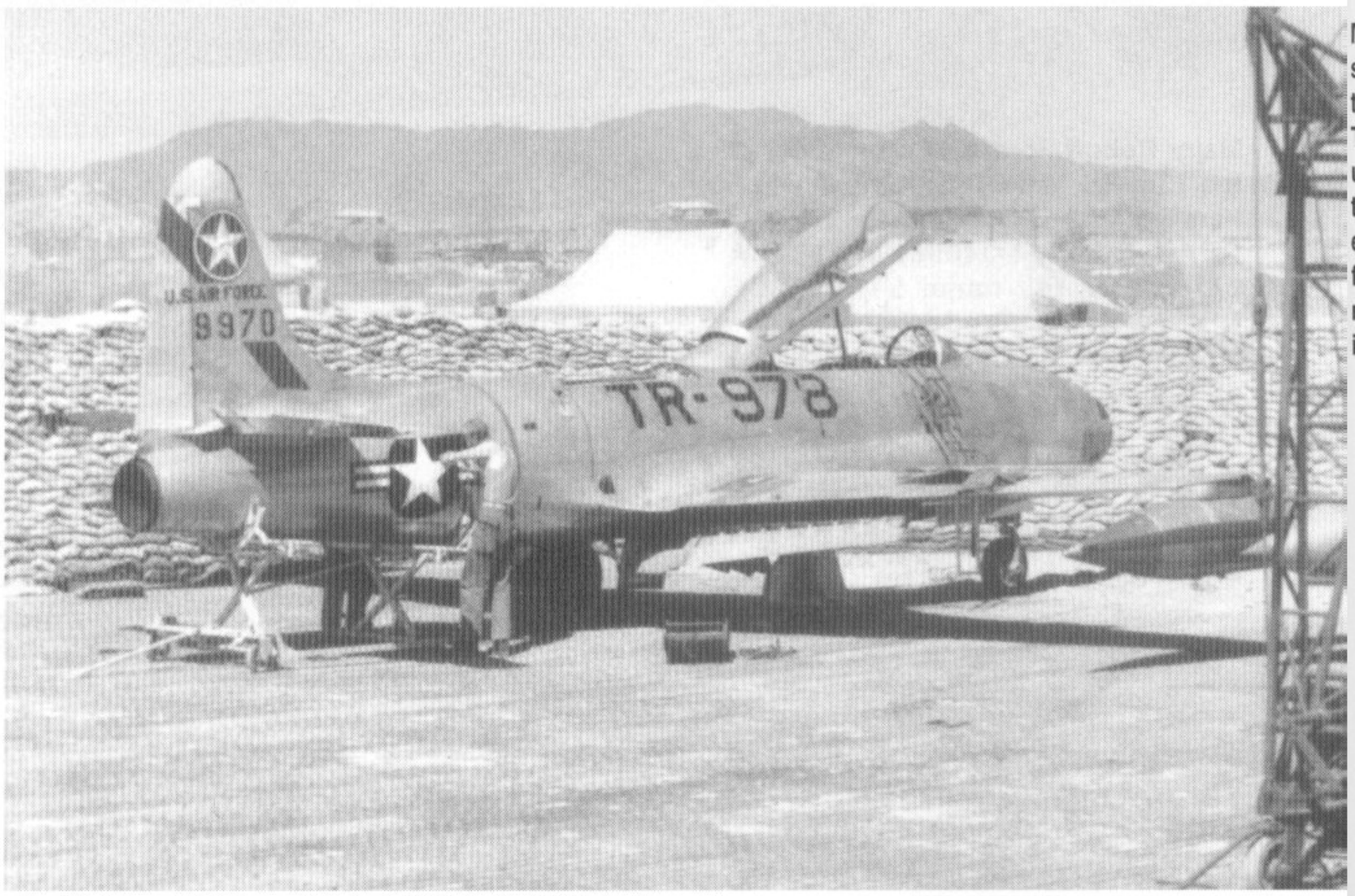


Frenchie/Lola K was an F-84E (51-613) assigned to the 8th FBS, 49th FBW at Taegu during 1952. The Thunderjet is loaded with bombs and a double layer of rockets for a strike against road traffic north of the front. The F-84 was the premier fighter-bomber of the war, replacing the F-80. Although no match for the MiG-15 at altitude, down on the deck the Thunderjet could hold its own against the faster Soviet fighter. F-84s claimed ten MiGs during the war. (USAF/NA via Bell)



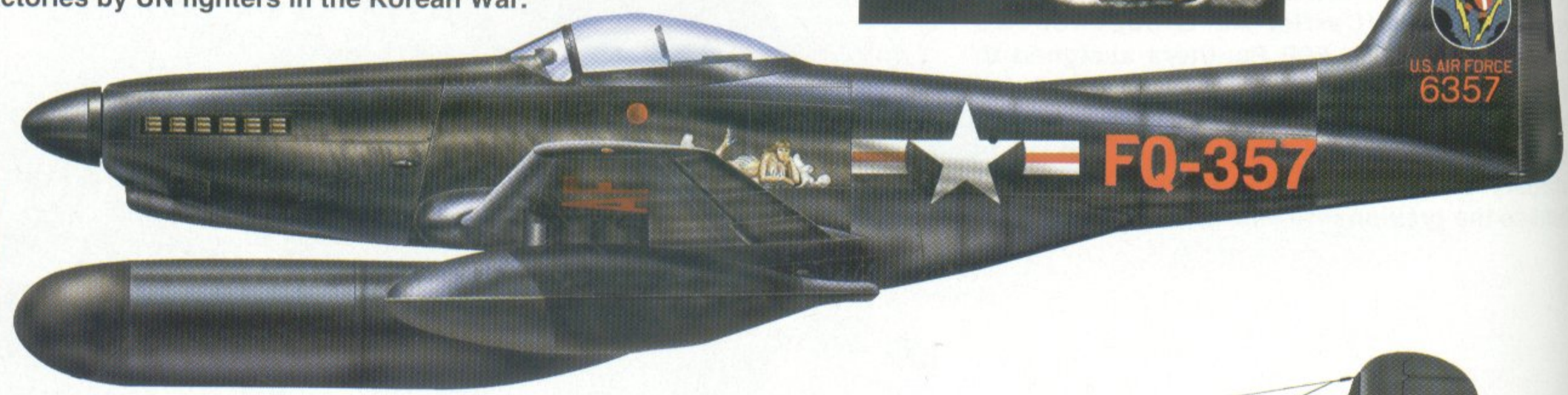
The ESSEX was shortly followed into the war zone by the USS ANTIETAM (CV-36). Arrayed along the ANTIETAMs after flight deck are aircraft from CVG (Carrier Air Group)-15: F4U Corsairs of VF-713, F9F Panthers assigned to VF-831 and VF-837, and a single AD-4W Skyraider from VC-11. All of CVG-15's fighter units were Reserve squadrons, called up in February of 1951 – after the intervention of the Chinese the previous November. (USN/NA)

More distinct variants of the Lockheed F-80 saw service in Korea than probably any other aircraft type, including the F-80, RF-80, F-94, and the T-33. This T-33A (49-970) from the 116th FBG undergoes maintenance in a revetment during the fall of 1951. These aircraft were used for general liaison duties or combat orientation flights for new pilots. Many T-33s were armed with two nose-mounted .50 caliber (12.7MM) machine guns in case MiGs were on the prowl. (USAF/NA)

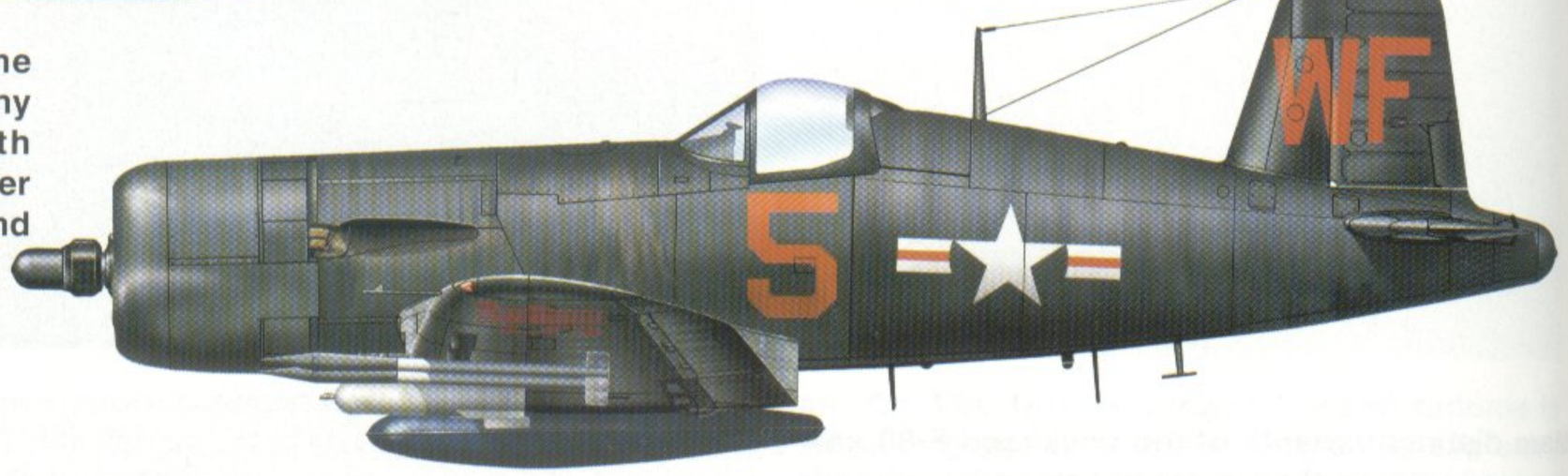


An F-86A Sabre (49-1127) of the 4th FIW sits on the side of the runway at Kimpo, while a ground power unit is plugged into the Sabre's fuselage to provide the aircraft's systems with electrical power and compressed air. Behind the F-86, cargo specialists unload a Douglas C-124A Globemaster II (49-256). The C-124 was one the largest transports at the time and hauled large amounts of men and material to the war zone. Its clamshell nose doors allowed bulky cargo and vehicles to be loaded with relative ease. (USAF/NA)

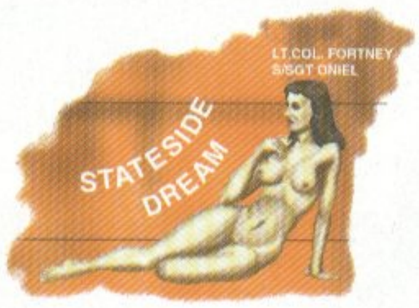
North American F-82G Twin Mustang (46-357) was operated by the 68th F(AW)S at Hatzuke, Japan during the summer of 1950. Twin Mustangs shot down two Yak-9s over Kimpo airfield on 27 June 1950 – the first victories by UN fighters in the Korean War.

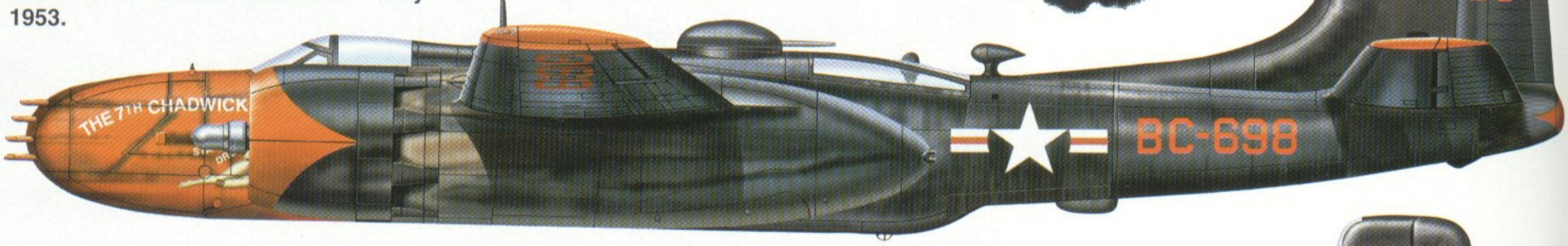


During the desperate fighting to hold the Pusan Perimeter in 1950, UN forces used any available aircraft to attack the North Koreans. This F4U-5N Corsair night fighter from VMF(N)-513 is armed with rockets and bombs for a close air support mission.

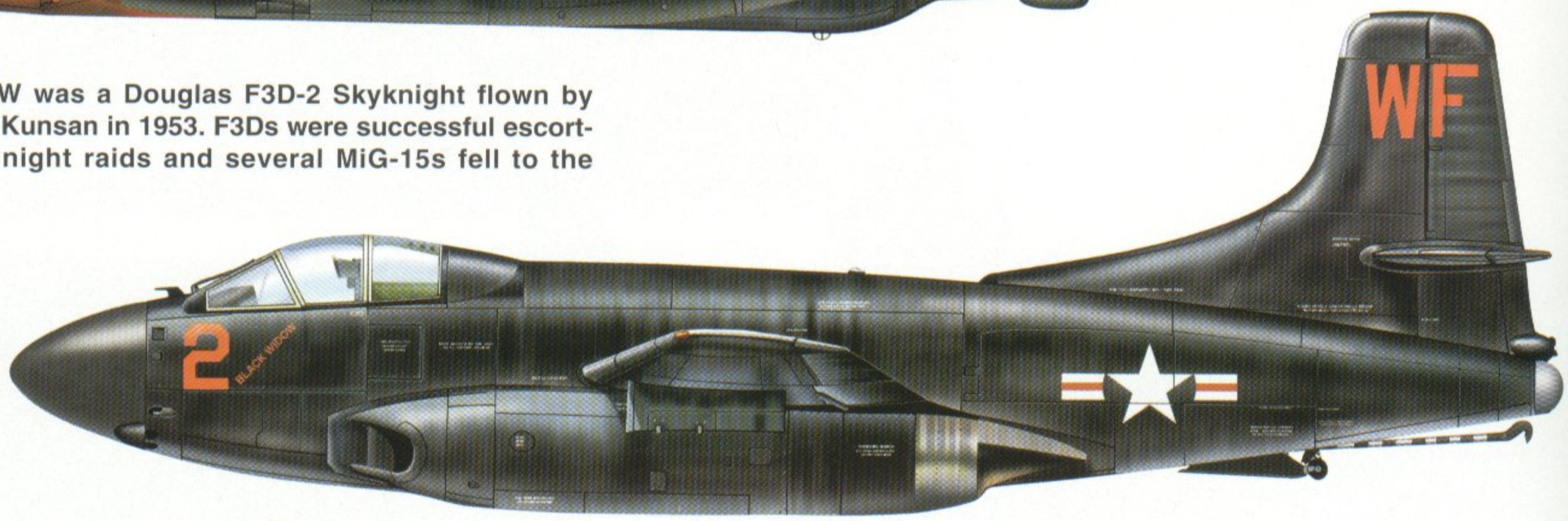


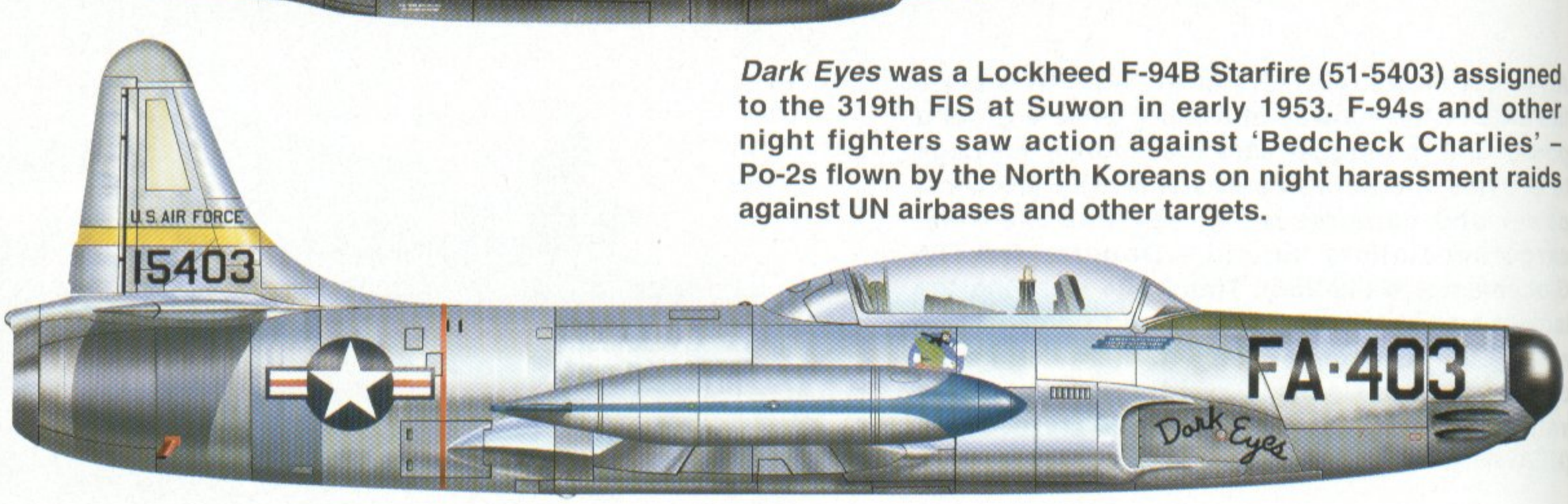
Major Robert Fortney, Commander of the 13th BS, 3rd BG at Kunsan (K-8), flew Douglas B-26B Invader THE 7TH CHADWICK (44-34698) in 1952. A pinup with the name STATESIDE DREAM is obscured by the engine cowling. An RB-26 flew the last mission of the Korean War on 27 July 1953.





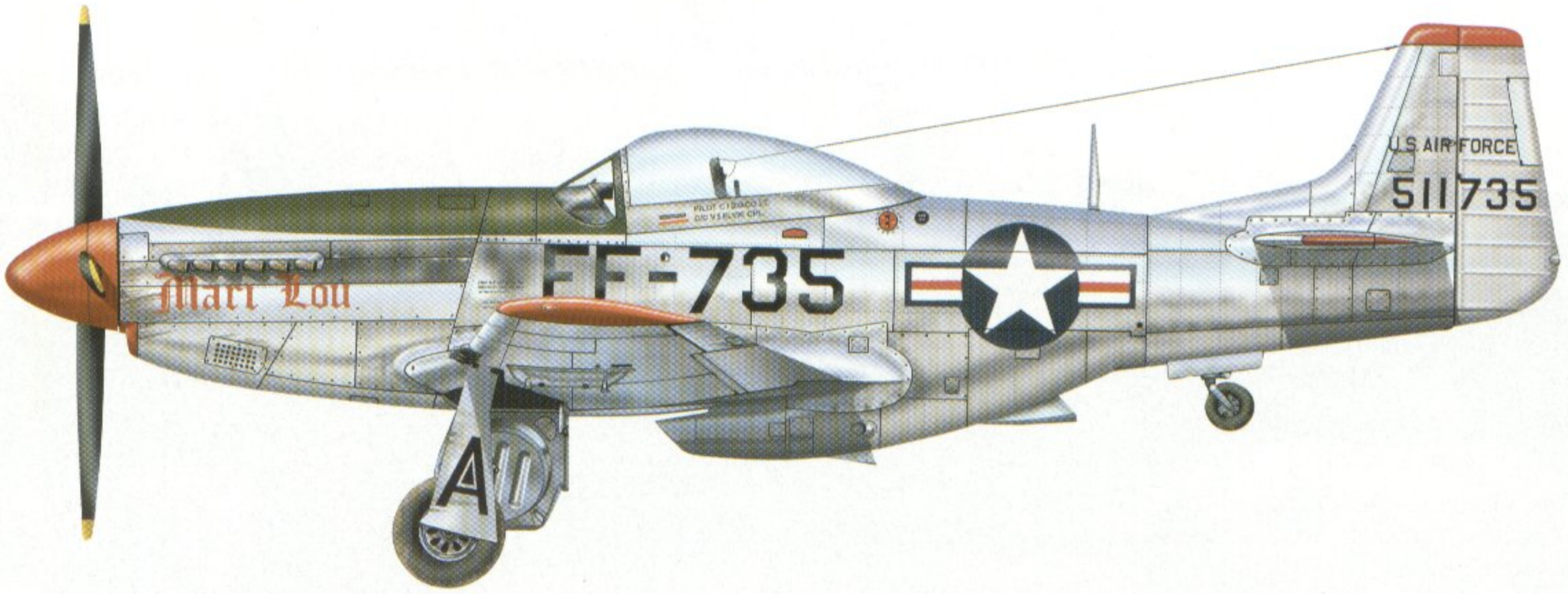
BLACK WIDOW was a Douglas F3D-2 Skyknight flown by VMF(N)-513 at Kunsan in 1953. F3Ds were successful escorting B-29s on night raids and several MiG-15s fell to the Skyknights.



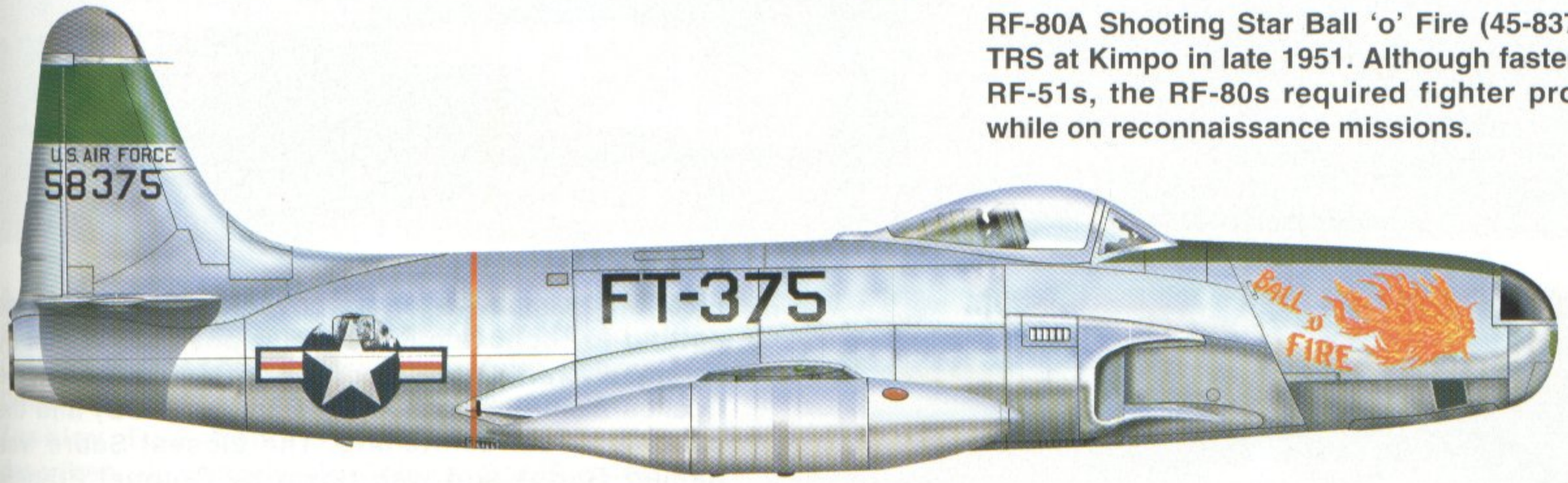


Dark Eyes was a Lockheed F-94B Starfire (51-5403) assigned to the 319th FIS at Suwon in early 1953. F-94s and other night fighters saw action against 'Bedcheck Charlies' – Po-2s flown by the North Koreans on night harassment raids against UN airbases and other targets.

F-51D *Mari Lou* was assigned to Lt F. I. Jones of the 45th TRS at Taegu in the late summer of 1950. Regular Mustangs escorted RF-51Ds on reconnaissance missions over enemy positions.

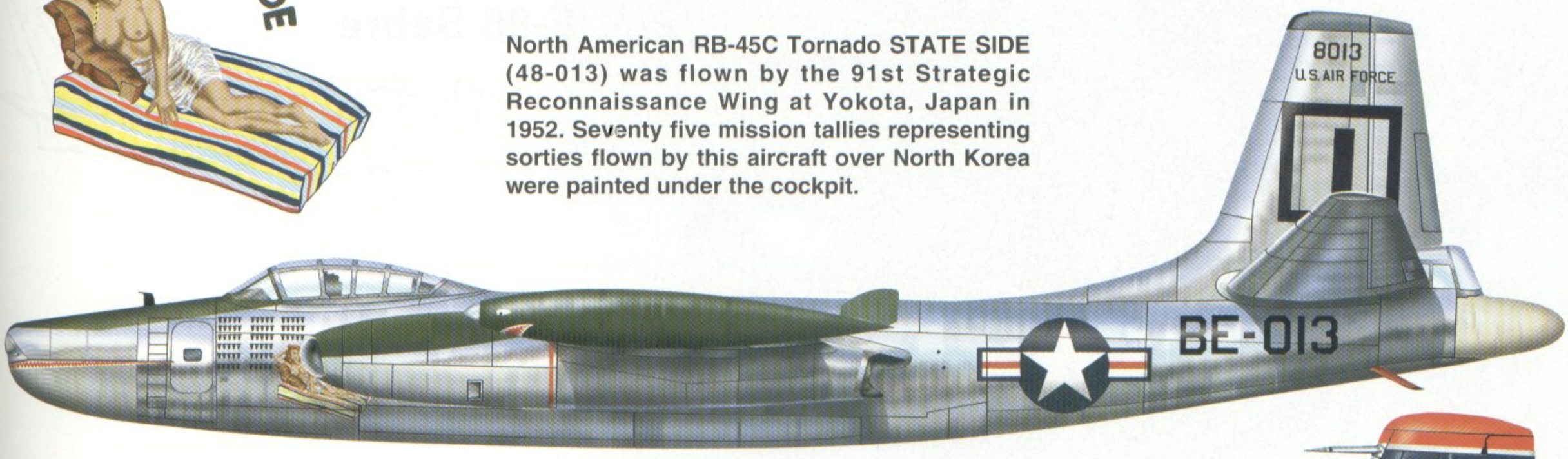


RF-80A Shooting Star Ball 'o' Fire (45-8375) was flown by the 15th TRS at Kimpo in late 1951. Although faster than the propeller-driven RF-51s, the RF-80s required fighter protection against MiG-15s while on reconnaissance missions.

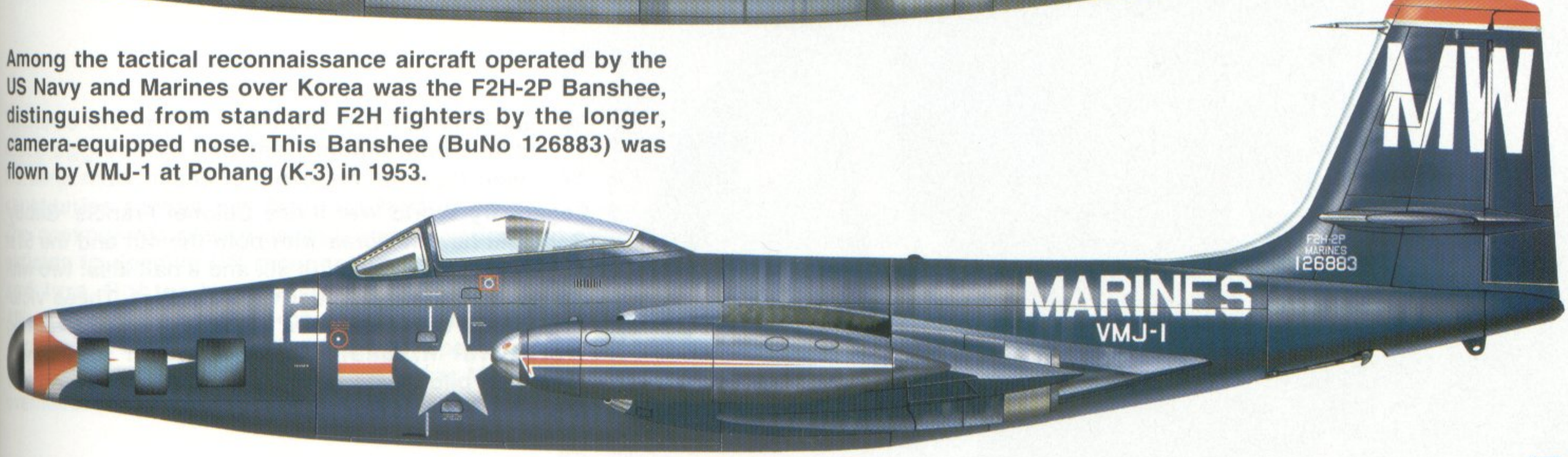


North American T-6G Texan (42-85260) was a Forward Air Controller (FAC) assigned to the 6147th TCS at Seoul City Airport in 1952. FACs – nicknamed 'Mosquitoes' after their call sign – directed UN fighter-bomber pilots to their ground targets.

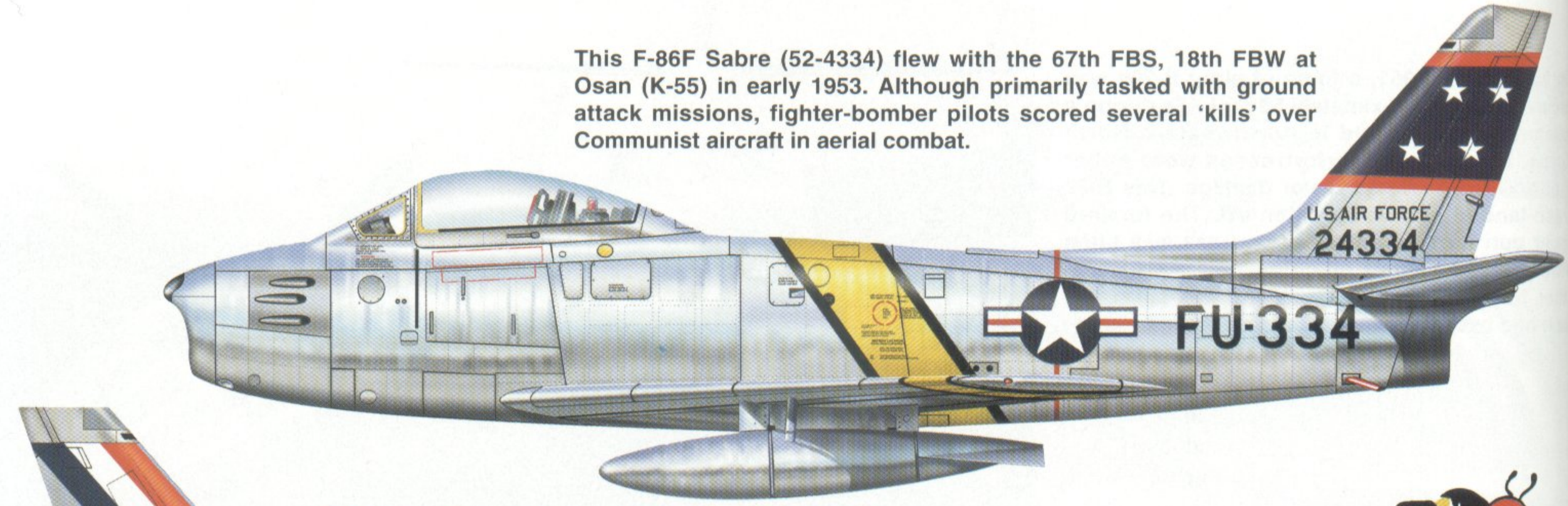
North American RB-45C Tornado STATE SIDE (48-013) was flown by the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Wing at Yokota, Japan in 1952. Seventy five mission tallies representing sorties flown by this aircraft over North Korea were painted under the cockpit.



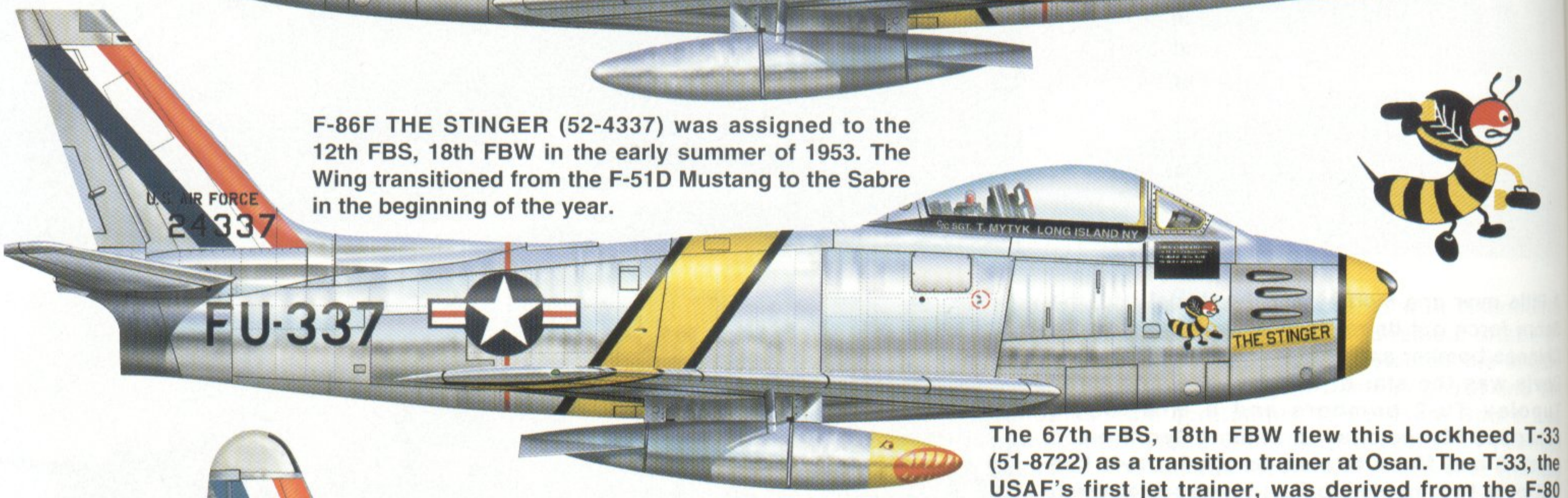
Among the tactical reconnaissance aircraft operated by the US Navy and Marines over Korea was the F2H-2P Banshee, distinguished from standard F2H fighters by the longer, camera-equipped nose. This Banshee (BuNo 126883) was flown by VMJ-1 at Pohang (K-3) in 1953.



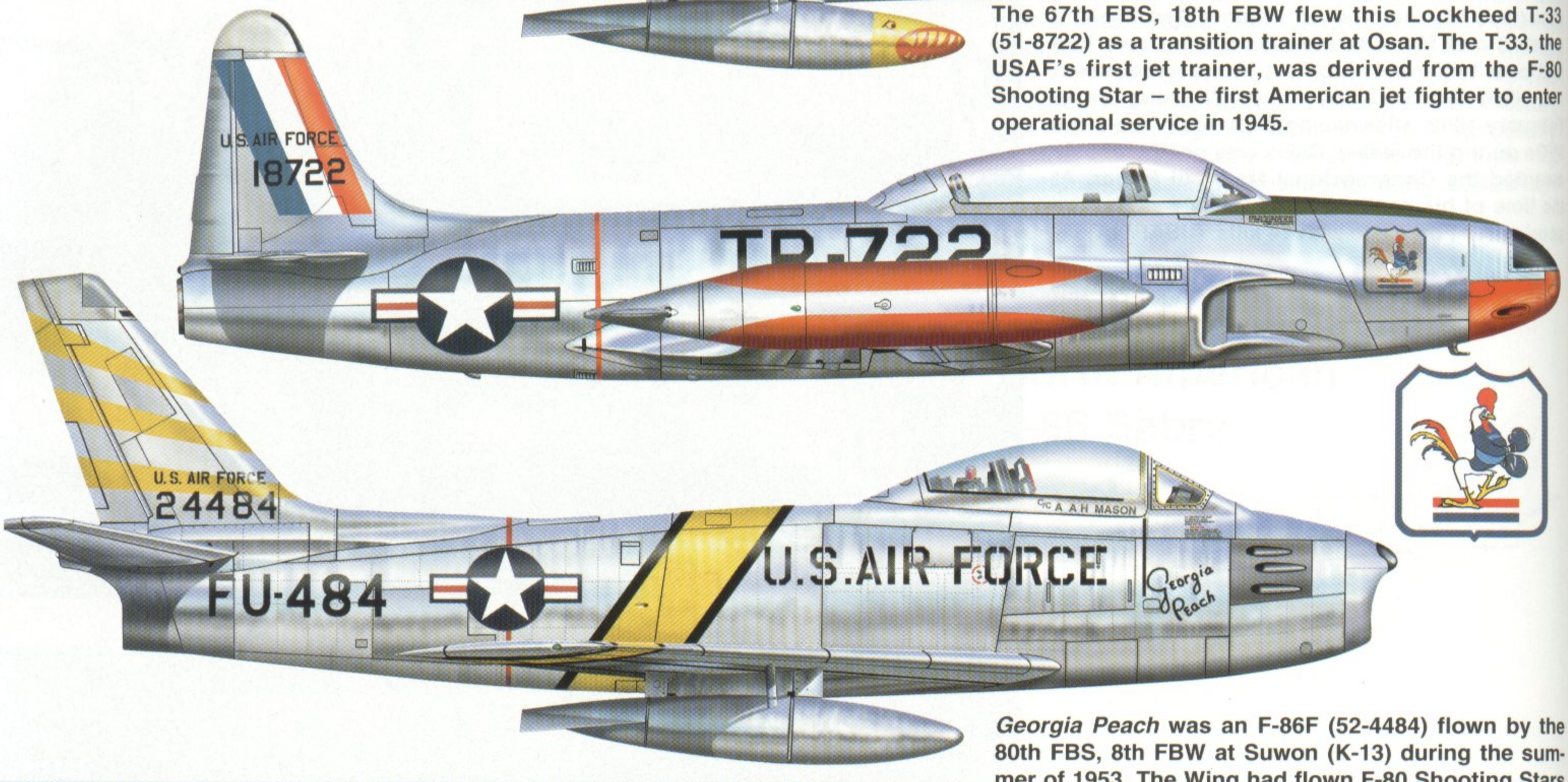
This F-86F Sabre (52-4334) flew with the 67th FBS, 18th FBW at Osan (K-55) in early 1953. Although primarily tasked with ground attack missions, fighter-bomber pilots scored several 'kills' over Communist aircraft in aerial combat.



F-86F THE STINGER (52-4337) was assigned to the 12th FBS, 18th FBW in the early summer of 1953. The Wing transitioned from the F-51D Mustang to the Sabre in the beginning of the year.



The 67th FBS, 18th FBW flew this Lockheed T-33 (51-8722) as a transition trainer at Osan. The T-33, the USAF's first jet trainer, was derived from the F-80 Shooting Star – the first American jet fighter to enter operational service in 1945.



Georgia Peach was an F-86F (52-4484) flown by the 80th FBS, 8th FBW at Suwon (K-13) during the summer of 1953. The Wing had flown F-80 Shooting Stars before their replacement by the faster Sabres the previous spring.

MISS B, an F-86E-1 from the 51st FIW, taxies out for a mission at Suwon in early 1952. The checkered tail markings, which were to become the unit trademark, had not yet been added. The conversion of the 51st Wing to F-86s was a major step toward evening the odds against the growing MiG-15 force being assembled north of the Yalu River. (USAF/NA via Bell)

Three Lockheed F-80 Shooting Stars from the 8th FBG at Suwon (K-13) await a call from a FAC to hit an enemy target. Loaded with 500 lb (226.8 KG) bombs, the fighter-bombers stayed on station until they either received a call or reached 'Bingo' fuel — the point where they have just enough fuel to get home with a few minutes' reserve. Lacking a FAC call, fighter-bombers often looked for targets of opportunity rather than land with a full load of ordnance. (USAF/NA)

The MiGs became more aggressive and intent on action. On 9 September, during a raid on the North Korean Military Academy, 175 MiGs intercepted a strike by 82 F84s, which was covered by a heavy force of F-86s. Despite heroic efforts on the part of the F-86s, 77 MiGs broke through and downed three F-84s while forcing others to jettison their bomb loads. At least six MiGs were shot down and six more were claimed as probables. Throughout the remainder of the year the communists kept up the pressure, but the F-86 pilots held their own and soundly defeated the MiGs at every turn. By the end of the year, there were sixteen new aces between the two fighter wings — ten from the 4th and six from the 51st.

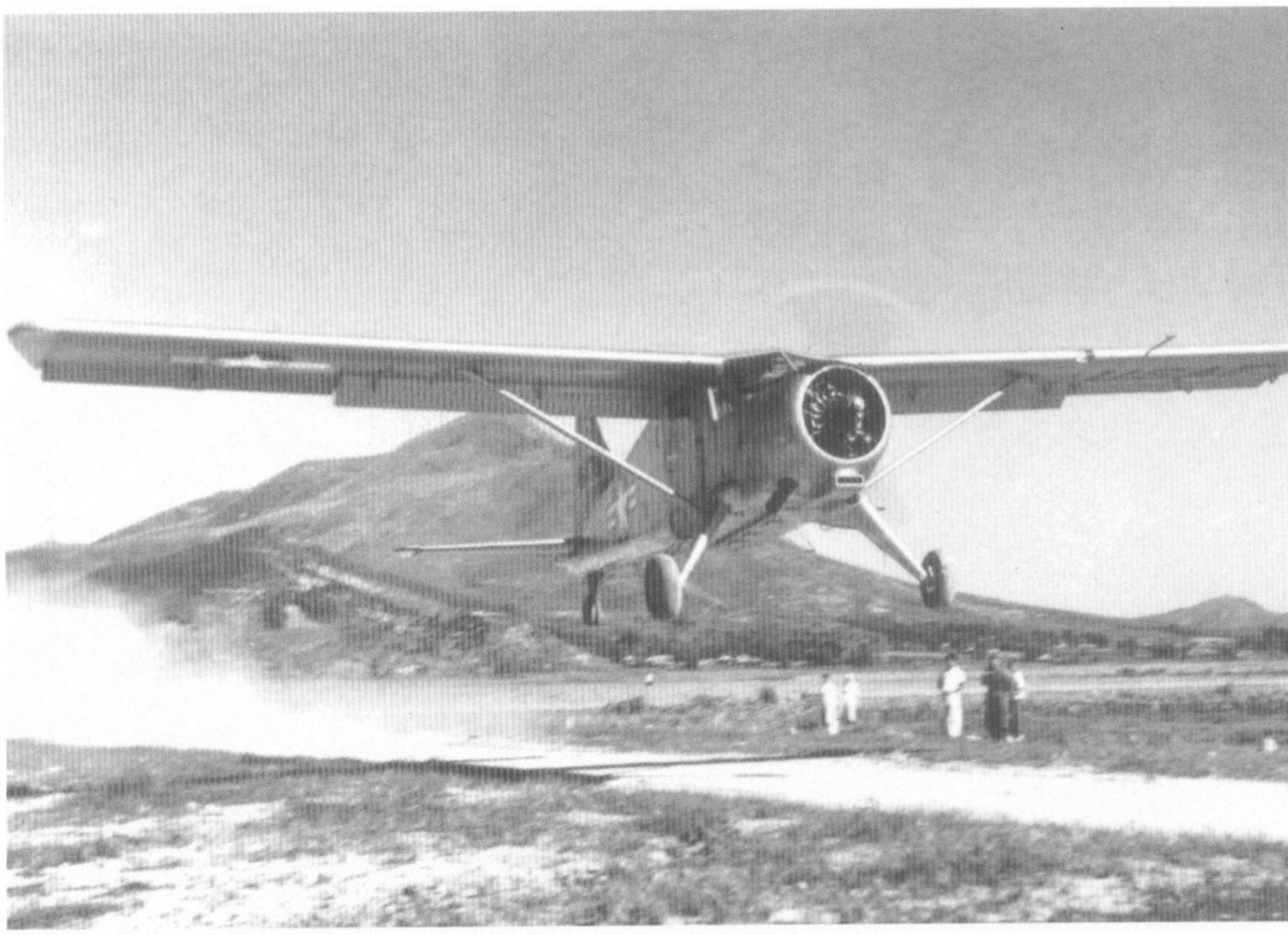
The 4th FIW had also flown a number of missions to see how well the Sabre performed in the fighter-bomber role. Attacks were carried out against Sinuiju and Uiji airfields and the railroad marshaling yards at Kunu-ri. Results were good, but over Kunu-ri, the unit lost its commander, Colonel Walker (Bud) Mahurin, the famous WW II ace who was downed by ground fire and captured by the Chinese. Mahurin, who had three and a half kills, was subjected to a lengthy imprisonment and 'brainwashing' by the Chinese; he was not released until well after the war. His book on this experience, "Honest John", describes in vivid detail his treatment at the hands of the communists and foreshadowed the future experiences of American pilots during the Vietnam War. As a result of the 4th FIW's work, plans were made to reequip both the 8th and 18th FBWs with F-86Fs as new production fighters became available. Included in the conversion plan was No. 2 Squadron of the South African Air Force, then attached to the 18th FBW. This change would give the fighter-bomber units the flexibility to be used in their primary mission of ground support and to supplement the fighters in the battles over 'MiG Alley.' Initial projections for the changeover were for November, but a variety of problems pushed this back and actual operations with the new aircraft did not begin until 1953.

This FAC LT-6G was hit by enemy fire, yet was fortunate to make it back to friendly territory. The amount of damage made it likely this aircraft was salvageable and would fly again. FACs were hated by enemy ground troops and, if shot down and captured, were often subjected to horrible torture before being killed. Every effort was made to rescue any FAC shot down behind enemy lines. (USAF/NA)

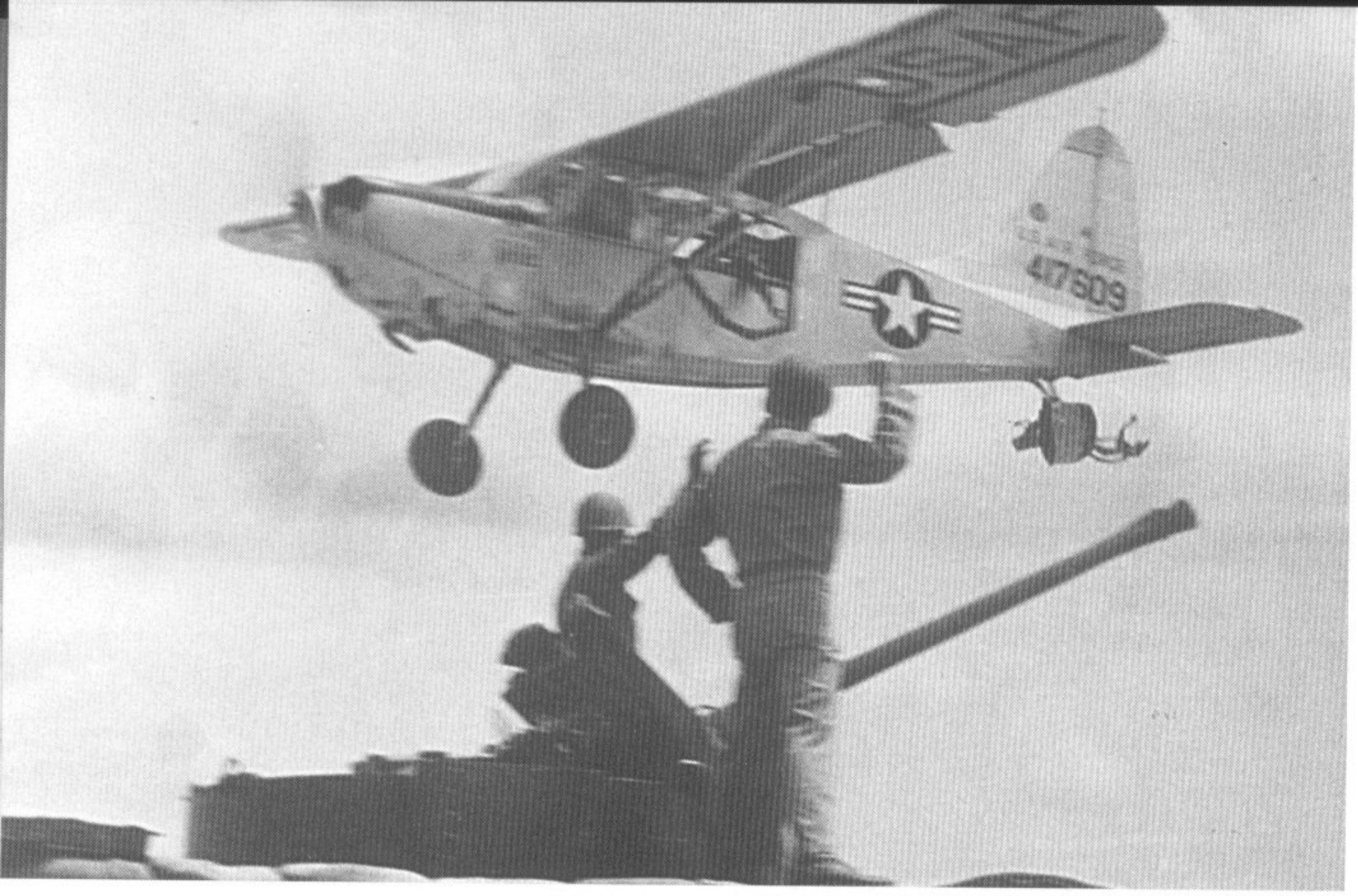
A group of 8th FBG F-80s armed with 1000 lb (453.6 KG) bombs taxi down an access ramp at Suwon. These weapons were used with good effect against railroad lines since even a near miss could cause a great deal of damage against the rail bed. Unfortunately, operating on Pierced Steel Planking (PSP) runways caused a great deal of damage to tires and blowouts often occurred when taking off — an unpleasant event when loaded with fuel and ordnance. (USAF/NA)

During the summer of 1952 the 136th FBW – an Air National Guard unit called up at the beginning of the conflict – was redesignated the 58th FBW. To bring all the F-84 Thunderjet units up to strength, enough F-84Gs were shipped to Korea so that by September all the fighter-bomber wings were at full strength — the first time this had occurred in over a year. The markings on the nose and tip tanks were yellow with black outlines. (USAF/NA)

There were a multitude of other tasks for which aircraft were utilized in Korea — aside from bombing and fighter sweeps. The new de Havilland Canada L-20 Beaver was used for communication, casualty evacuation, supply, and a host of other jobs. This Beaver from the 10th Liaison Squadron takes off from a small forward airstrip after delivering supplies and personnel to the forward area. Docile and easy to fly, the L-20 was an ideal aircraft for getting in and out of short fields with little difficulty. (USAF/NA)



A C-47A (42-108993) is loaded with wounded from an ambulance at a small forward airstrip near the front line. After being stabilized at a MASH (Mobile Surgical Army Hospital) unit or forward aid station, casualties were then flown to better equipped rear area facilities for additional medical attention. The overall mortality rate for wounded dropped dramatically compared to the rate for World War II. (USAF/NA)



One of the best morale boosters was mail fr
home. This Stinson L-5E Sentinel (44-176
drops a mail sack to troops manning an M
40MM self-propelled anti-aircraft vehicle. L
were used throughout the war for communi
tions and liaison. Early in the war, Sentin
were also used as FACs until replaced by fas
T-6s. (USAF/NA)

A Lockheed P2V-5 Neptune assigned to VP
heads out on a patrol mission from Atsu
Japan. Navy patrol squadrons – flying coas
surveillance and reconnaissance, anti-subm
rine patrols, convoy escort, gunfire spottin
and interdiction missions – performed one of t
most unheralded jobs of the war. A number
these aircraft were downed over internation
waters by Soviet and Chinese fighters during t
war. Seven Neptune squadrons eventually sa
service in Korean waters during the conflic
(USAF/NA)

One of the stalwarts of the US Navy's Korea
War effort was the aircraft carrier USS BOXE
(CV-21), which took part in four deployment
She also delivered the initial load of 145 P-51s t
Korea in July of 1950. The BOXER carries
mixed load of Skyraiders, Panthers, and a lon
Banshee spotted adjacent to the island. Leadin
the starboard column of aircraft, on the forwar
edge of the flight deck, is an AD-4W. This ai
borne early warning variant of the AD Skyraide
is distinguished by its large under fuselag
radome. The carrier's bow mounted 40MM gun
have their barrels removed. (USN/NA)

The Marines experimented with helicopters for mass troop and supply movement, a forerunner of airmobile operations later used in Vietnam. These Sikorsky HRS-1s of HMR-161 depart from the USS SICILY (CVE-118) to deploy a battalion of Marines near Inchon. Each HRS could carry eight fully equipped troops in and out of battle. The Sikorsky HRS was called the H-19 Chickasaw by the US Army and Air Force, who also operated the type in Korea. (USMC/NA)

A fully equipped Marine fire team exits a HRS-1 on the beach during OPERATION MARLIN 5 in September of 1952. This exercise successfully tested the concept of moving supplies and personnel by helicopter from an aircraft carrier offshore to the coast. The Marines eventually tested this vertical envelopment concept in battle and moved an entire unit and its artillery behind enemy lines with remarkable success. During the Korean War, Marine helicopters were painted overall Glossy Sea Blue (FS15042) with white lettering. (USMC/NA)

During hot weather, the F-84s often used Jet Assisted Take Off (JATO) bottles to help get the heavily loaded fighter-bombers into the air. This F-84E Thunderjet (51-634) from the 49th FBG uses a single JATO bottle to help it lift off the runway at Taegu (K-2). The aircraft is armed with two 500 lb bombs under the wings. (USAF/NA)

The 452nd BG was transferred back to Air National Guard control in the spring of 1952; however, its men and aircraft remained in Korea under a new name — the 17th BG. The two B-26 groups each took half of Korea as their responsibility, the 3rd BG at Kunsan (K-8) operating over western Korea and the 17th BG at Pusan (K-9) flying over the east. This B-26C Invader (44-34656) has just returned to Pusan from a mission against rail targets. The B-26 is taxiing in front of a Marine Douglas R5D – the Navy and Marine designation for the C-54. (USAF/NA)

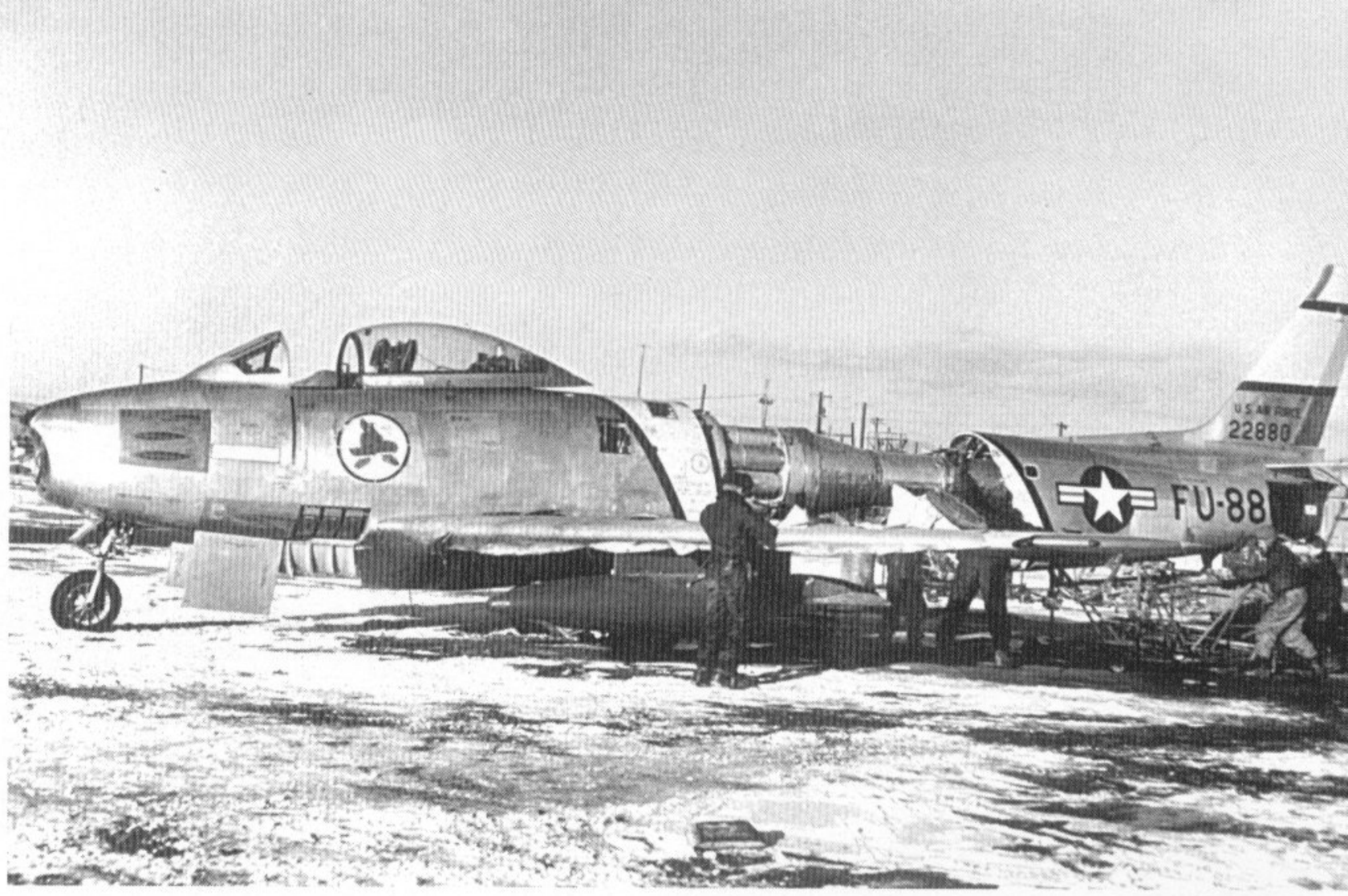
An F2H-2 Banshee of VF-11 from the USS KEARSARGE rolls in on a target over North Korea in November of 1952. The VF-11 insignia is painted below the windshield. The leading edges of the wings and tail and the jet exhaust areas are natural metal, while the top of the vertical stabilizer is Light Blue (FS15102). The Banshee proved to be an effective and stable fighter-bomber and was well liked by its pilots. The first major success of the McDonnell firm, the F2H Banshee paved the way for one of the greatest fighters in aviation history — the F-4 Phantom. (USN/NA)

(Above) Fairchild C-119 Flying Boxcars of the 314th Troop Carrier Group (TCG) carry elements of the 187th Airborne Regiment to Korea in late 1952. The C-119s were ideal for airborne operations, yet the situation in Korea did not lend itself to airborne drops after the early months of the war. The 187th Abn Rgt was kept as a theater reserve and was flown to Korea on numerous occasions when a large-scale communist offensive seemed imminent. (USAF/NA)

(Below) An F-86F (51-12948) assigned to the 335th FIS, 4th FIW i readied for a mission from Kimpo north to 'MiG Alley' in Decembe of 1952. The use of tarps to protect the canopy, control surfaces and leading edge of the wing was necessary during the harsh winte climate. The reinforced ammunition bin door formed part of th means of access to the wing and cockpit. A 120 gallon (454.2 L) dro tank is mounted under each wing to increase the Sabre's endurance (USAF/NA)

Deck crewmen shovel snow off a tie down point on the flight deck of the USS ORISKANY (CV-34), amid F4U Corsairs and AD Skyraiders parked behind them. During the winter months, carrier operations off the Korean coast were extremely hazardous for both the pilots and the deck crews. Slippery conditions made it difficult when servicing or rearming aircraft. Icy decks made landing conditions treacherous and created dangerous situations for deck crews — one slip could make them fall into a whirling propeller blade or overboard into the frigid water. (USN/NA)

The lack of spare Sabre parts was an early problem, forcing many F-86s to be unavailable for operations. By 1953, the problem had been solved and the daily operational strength of the Sabre-equipped units was consistently high. This F-86E (52-2880) from the 334th FIS, 4th FIW has an engine change performed under snowy conditions at Kimpo. A special trailer was designed to hold the rear fuselage when it was unbolted from the forward section. Four hardened bolts held these two fuselage sections together. (USAF/NA)



Hague, but before it came to trial the Russians dropped the suit. A more serious form of retaliation by the Russians occurred two days after the incident. Russian MiG-15s shot down an RB-50 over international waters southeast of Vladivostok while it was on an electronic reconnaissance mission along the Russian coast. US analysts linked the two incidents together and felt the Soviets carried out the attack in direct response to the US attack. One crewman from the RB-50 was rescued by an American destroyer although it is believed some of the crew may have been captured by the Russians and kept for interrogation due to their specialized knowledge of radar and electronics.

Peace

Although the aerial battles over 'MiG Alley' captured headlines and made an impression on the communist high command, the bombing campaign was the primary means of bringing pressure on the North. The election of Dwight D. Eisenhower to the presidency, and the death of Josef Stalin, the Russian leader, laid the groundwork for a return to the truce talks. By April of 1953 there was guarded optimism that a breakthrough might be close at hand. There was also a Chinese attempt to seize more territory along the MLR in order to strengthen their bargaining position. In response to such moves the UN forces carried out hundreds of sorties daily in support of the ground troops. Inflammatory radio comments by the North Korean radio station in Pyongyang led to a massive strike against the facility after warning leaflets were dropped telling civilians to leave. On 1 May the station was leveled by wave after wave of F-86s which lined up and dropped their bombs as if on a gunnery range. Despite the advance warning and the blatant attack on the North Korean capital, not one MiG tried to intercept the fighter-bombers, which were covered by higher flights of F-86s.

During May another series of attacks were carried out which helped get the peace talks back on track after the communist negotiators began to stall. Until this time the irrigation dams in North Korea had been off-limits — they were viewed as politically sensitive targets. Plans were drawn up to hit the Toksan, Chasan, and Kuwonga dams in western Korea using both Air Force and Marine aircraft. If the dams could be breached, the released water was expected to destroy crops and road and rail lines over an extensive area. On 13 May the Toksan dam was destroyed with extensive damage being done to both the rice crops and lines of communications. Chasan was next on 16 May — with similar results. The attack against the Kuwonga dam was not carried out until the night of 20 May. The delay allowed the North Koreans to lower the water level and negate the effects of the strike. Even so, the water loss severely affected the rice crop in the area and deprived the North Koreans of much needed food for the frontline troops. After these attacks negotiations picked up again, but the communists were still making probes along the MLR.

At the end of May the Chinese launched a series of attacks all along the MLR. The main attack came in early June when the Chinese hit the ROK II Corps around Kumsong. In response, the Air Force and Marines flew round-the-clock sorties using radar to guide them to targets at night or in the increasingly inclement weather. The Navy responded by keep-

Maintenance personnel wash down an F-86E (52-2846) from the 336th FIS, 4th FIW. Accumulated dirt and grime could slow an aircraft down and cause problems with controls and other moving parts. This Sabre wears the black and yellow ID bands introduced in 1952. These bands – applied to the outer wing surfaces and mid-fuselage – easily distinguished F-86s from similar-appearing MiG-15s in air combat. The yellow and black bands on the vertical stabilizer were unique to the 4th FIW. (USAF/NA)

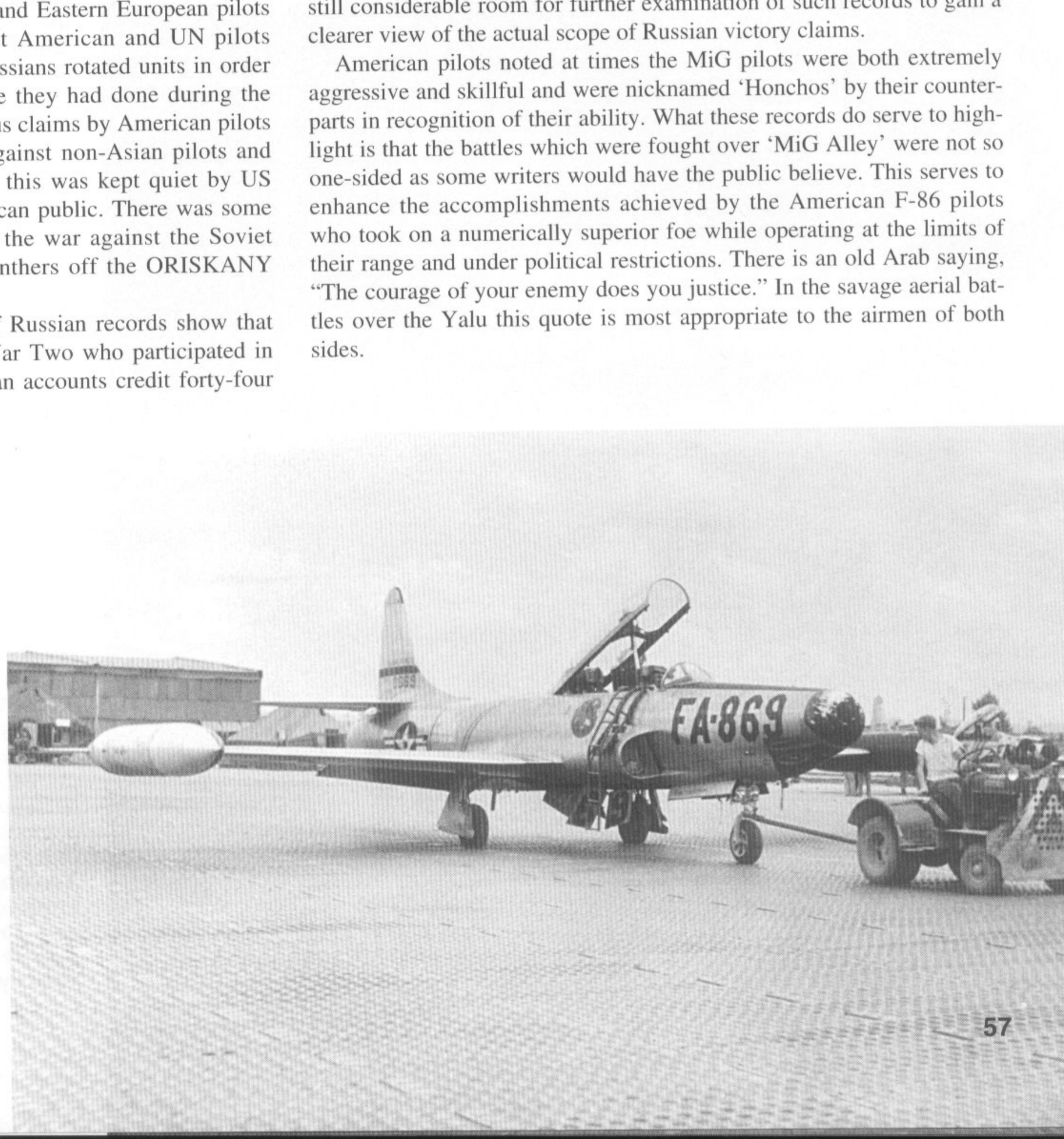
LT-6Gs prepare to take off on a FAC mission in early 1953. There was always the danger the communists would try to escalate the war with a surprise attack against UN airbases — sandbagged revetments were built to provide protection for individual aircraft. Although no major attacks ever occurred, the communists made many attacks against airfields and other installations using old trainers and other prop-driven aircraft, usually at night. Sometimes known as 'Bedcheck Charlies,' these raiders – often flying Polikarpov Po-2 biplanes – proved to be a major nuisance. (USAF/NA)

the pilots who were captured were never accounted for and it is believed that a significant number of these were transported to the Soviet Union for interrogation. This has been confirmed by recent documents unearthed and released by the current Russian government. In particular F-86 pilots were singled out along with bomber crewmen with knowledge of radar and electronics. Whatever became of these men can only be guessed — and it is highly unlikely that any of these missing men are still alive somewhere in Russia.

It has also been confirmed that Russian and Eastern European pilots flew hundreds of combat missions against American and UN pilots along the Yalu throughout the war. The Russians rotated units in order to give them combat experience much like they had done during the Spanish Civil War. There had been numerous claims by American pilots throughout the war that they had flown against non-Asian pilots and intelligence also suspected this. However, this was kept quiet by US officials in order not to provoke the American public. There was some fear that there would be a call to expand the war against the Soviet Union. The MiG-15 attack against the Panthers off the ORISKANY cited earlier lends credence to this view.

In line with this a close examination of Russian records show that there were five Soviet aces from World War Two who participated in the fighting and became aces again. Russian accounts credit forty-four of their pilots with five or more victories. Their top ranking aces were Captain Nikolay Sutiagin, with twenty-one victories, and Colonel Evgeniy Pepelyaev with twenty kills. If these records are accurate these two pilots were the top aces of the conflict, beating the top American ace Captain Joseph McConnell for this honor. While some historians may question these Russian claims, it need only be remembered that a number of American aces were shot down including McConnell and George Davis. This does lend support to the Russian claims, but there is still considerable room for further examination of such records to gain a clearer view of the actual scope of Russian victory claims.

American pilots noted at times the MiG pilots were both extremely aggressive and skillful and were nicknamed 'Honchos' by their counterparts in recognition of their ability. What these records do serve to highlight is that the battles which were fought over 'MiG Alley' were not so one-sided as some writers would have the public believe. This serves to enhance the accomplishments achieved by the American F-86 pilots who took on a numerically superior foe while operating at the limits of their range and under political restrictions. There is an old Arab saying, "The courage of your enemy does you justice." In the savage aerial battles over the Yalu this quote is most appropriate to the airmen of both sides.



UN forces tried different ways to stop these night intruders, including Lockheed F-94 Starfires – the most sophisticated night-fighter in the US inventory. This F-94B (50-869) from the 319th FIS is being towed back to its revetment at Suwon following a night mission over the Seoul/Kimpo area in June of 1953. The two blue stripes on the aft fuselage indicated this Starfire was a flight leader's aircraft. The 39th FIS emblem appeared under the cockpit, while the tail stripe was red. (USAF/NA)

An F-94B (51-5416) brightens the ramp with i
afterburner during a full power run-up prior
takeoff from Suwon in the early summer of 195
Two F-94s were lost during the war: one stalle
out when it lowered its airspeed to keep pac
with a Po-2 biplane, and another collided with a
enemy aircraft during an interception. (USAF/NA

A ground crewman pumps hot air into the engin
intake of SUNNY, an F-86E (52-2887) from th
51st FIW. The heated air warmed up the oil an
hydraulic fluids before the General Electric J4
engine was started. This type of ground suppo
was necessary if the jets were to be able to ope
ate in the cold weather, which often fell below
Fahrenheit (-18° Celsius). Another mechanic i
peering into the F-86's cockpit, while two other
stand on the Sabre's wing tending to the mid
fuselage area. A ground power unit plugged int
the aircraft's mid-fuselage provided the electrica
power for starting the engine. (USAF/NA)

The pilot of F-86F *Patricia* (52-4777) gives th
'thumbs up' sign to his crew chief while hi
engine kicks over with the assist of the starte
cart. The insignia on the fuselage side is a varia
tion of the standard 'boxing pigeon' emblem
used by the 334th FIS, 4th FIW. (USAF/NA)

ile the F-86s wreaked havoc on the MiGs, the
nter-bombers carried out their daily routine
ainst ground targets. This F-84G takes off
m Taegu in search of enemy road traffic north
the Main Line of Resistance (MLR), and is
ed with two 1000 lb (453.6 KG) bombs under
wings. The Thunderjet was assigned to the
h FBW at Kunsan (K-8). (USAF/NA)

e fighter-bombers caused tremendous dam-
e to enemy troops, vehicles, and supplies.
peated strikes by US Navy Panthers have cre-
d huge columns of smoke in front of this F9F
king an attack run with four napalm contain-
s under the wings. Napalm – an incendiary
terial composed of naphtha and palm oil –
s a favorite weapon against most targets
cept bridges, rail lines, roads, and dams.
SN/NA)

ne of the most prodigious of bomb haulers was
e Navy's AD Skyraider, which could carry a
avier payload than a World War II B-17 Flying
rtress. The deck crew prepares this AD-4 for a
ission from the USS BOXER while the pilot
akes his pre-flight walk around. Two 500 lb
26.8 KG) general purpose bombs and three 250
(113.4 KG) fragmentation bombs are mounted
the underwing racks of the folded starboard
ng. The Douglas Skyraider would later see ser-
ce in Vietnam where the USAF was forced to
vallow its pride and use this Navy aircraft in
e ground support role since it had nothing
mparable in its own inventory. (USN/NA)

Constant surveillance of enemy airfields and supply lines was essential in order to prevent the communists from building up their forces. An F2H-2P (PP-33) from VC-61 has just returned from a mission along the Yalu to check out enemy airfields. This variant of the Banshee featured an elongated nose section housing cameras. A VF-11 F2H-2 (T-114) flew along as an escort due to the th MiGs. These aircraft are flying above their home carrier, t KEARSARGE. Mission tallies were painted under the canopie two Banshees. (USN/NA)

A natural metal F9F-5 of VF-111 comes in for a landing aboard the USS BOXER. This scheme was tried on a few aircraft in different units to see how well it reacted to salt water. Some aircraft were painted half Glossy Sea Blue to compare the painted and clear-coated natural metal surfaces. The natural metal scheme was not ed due to corrosion problems. The overall Glossy Sea Blu scheme was replaced with the Light Gull Gray over Gloss W ish beginning on 23 February 1955. (USN/NA)

ese Air Force pilots are much more demon-
ative in their feelings about the end of the war.
ey have just completed a 'Peace Patrol' in
se the communists were planning to launch a
rprise attack. Firing his pistol into the air is
jor Foster Smith, who had four and a half kills.
mbing out of the 335th FIS F-86 is Captain
/de Curtin, who scored five victories. On the
ht is Captain Ralph Parr who claimed the last
l of the war, a Soviet Il-12 transport for which
e Soviets tried to sue him in the World Court.
rr's victory was his tenth, which tied him for
<th-best among US pilots in the conflict.
SAF/NA)

spite the end of the war, the uneasy truce
ich followed did not allow the UN forces to
p their guard. This F-86F from the 336th FIS,
FIW is refueled in late 1953. The Wing mark-
on the tail band is a post-Korean War prac-
e. Aircraft were kept fully fueled in order to be
dy for a quick takeoff in case of possible
emy attack and to prevent condensation
ldup caused by extremes in temperature.
AF/NA)

(Above) Three years after the truce was signed, the 58th FBG at Osan was still flying missions over Korea. KATHY'S KALAMITIZER (52-4829) wears the unit's new markings – red nose and tail bands, white stars, and black lightning bolts and trim. The F-86F still carries the black-trimmed yellow fuselage identification band associated with the Korean War. The pilot steps into the Sabre's cockpit with his crew chief ready to assist him. (USAF/NA)

(Below) The South Korean Air Force began to receive F-86s after the war ended. Aside from the markings – a variation of the US national insignia – these F-86Fs sitting in revetments could pass for USAF Sabres, which had sat there a few years earlier. Newer jets now patrol above the Korean peninsula — still considered one of the most dangerous points for a possible outbreak of hostilities — 50 years after the truce was signed. (USAF/NA)

BROWN NOSE, a B-26B (44-34552) from the 452nd BG, sits on PSP matting while its crew lounges around in the background prior to a mission. This aircraft flew the 10,000th sortie of the war in May of 1951. (USAF/NA via Bell)

My Mimi, an RF-51D (44-84778) of the 45th TRS, 67th TRW, taxis out for a photo-reconnaissance mission. The Squadron's trademark white dots on a blue surface are displayed on the pilot's helmet. Many of the 45th's aircraft had this pattern painted on their propeller spinners and wing tips. (USAF/NA via Bell)

DOUBLE OR NUTHIN', a B-29 from the 19th BG, taxies out on a mission from Kadena AB, Okinawa in 1952. By this stage in the war, the Superfortresses were used mainly for night bombing missions. (Dunderdale)

LITTLE BEAST II, an F-51D (44-84602) from the 12th FBS, 18th FBW, taxis out for a strike during the summer of 1952. The sharkmouth on the nose was the unit's trademark and was worn by many of their Mustangs during the latter stages of the war. This F-51 was lost in September of 1952. (USAF/NA via Bell)

A US Air Force H-5 Dragonfly undergoes maintenance in 1952. The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines used the H-5 in a number of roles. One of its most important jobs was evacuating casualties from the front lines. Wounded were carried in the capsule on the fuselage side. (USAF/NA via Bell)

Supporting the B-29 offensive were SB-29s equipped with a self-righting lifeboat carried beneath the fuselage. An SB-29 went along with the B-29 force to provide support for any bomber in trouble on the return flight to Kadena AB, Okinawa. If a B-29 went down, the lifeboat was dropped and the SB-29 circled the area to direct surface rescue forces to the area. (Dunderdale)

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